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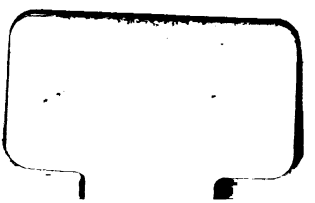

THE MATIN BELL,

AND THE

VILLAGE CHORISTERS.

OXFORD AND LONDON,
JOHN HENRY PARKER.
M DCCC LIV.

249. u. 19.

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The Matin Bell.

None can be good too soon,—give life's young morn
  Thy best, first fruits to God,—and not the lees;
The orient pearl of morning dew is born;
  Who would have manna, at the dawn must seize;
Whene'er, whate'er the call—to live or die,
  Say with obedient Samuel, "Here am I."

Churchyard Thoughts, No. cviii.

OXFORD and LONDON:

JOHN HENRY PARKER.

M DCCC LI.

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CHAP. I.

THE CHILD'S AWAKING.

"Yet as the wonted morning lauds arise
From early birds, and the Church answers well,
Wont in devotion's strains to sympathize
I seek to break the lures of worldly spell,
And join my warning voice to yonder parish bell."

MATIN BELL. BY THE BISHOP OF DOWN AND CONNOR.

THE early rays of the morning sun shone brightly and joyously on a tiny casement window in a low, thatched cottage, the deep projecting roof of which was in summer almost covered with roses, sweet eglantine and honeysuckle, and as its golden beams danced blithely on the twinkling panes, the light air gently stirred the rustling leaves around the lattice, and shook off the dew-drops that clustered like gems amid the scarcely budding flowers.

Close beneath the cottage eaves, and snugly sheltered from the weather, lay a bird's warm nest, and ever and anon, the brisk and tiny inmate would put forth its sleek head and slender

throat, or clinging to a hanging spray, or perching on the lattice-sill, warble forth, clear and gladsome, its matin song. It seemed as if flowers and sunshine, and gentle air and melodious song, were all conspiring at the lattice to awaken the little sleeper nestled within that cottage chamber. Shall we too peep in at the little window and see who is slumbering there?

A child of perhaps eight or nine years old lies stretched upon her little bed in calm repose, and smiling as she sleeps. Her dimpled cheeks are rosy and flushed, perhaps with some happy childish dream; her eyes fringed and shadowed by long silken lashes, are still closed; and her sweet mouth, arched and pouting, seems ready even in sleep for her mother's morning kiss, or perhaps still put up to meet in fancy the fond "good night" and whispered "God bless you" of yestereven.

Yet it may be doubted whether that still childish face, with its expanded and thoughtful brow, bore not the impress of something purer and holier than even a mother's kiss and blessing. Are not the dreams of children communings with an invisible world? May they not then hold mysterious converse with the glorious angels

who, as the poet of the Church has beautifully said, draw nearer "even to men in curtain'd sleep," because then they are

——— "removed from outer sight
And are brought nearer Heaven, and worlds more deep
Than waking thought divines*."

We know not half that is passing around, nor how near to each one among us may be those blessed and invisible spirits whose unceasing duty it is to guard with tender care and love even such "creatures base" as we.

As the breeze disturbed the clustering leaves that shaded the lattice, a bright stream of sunny light poured into the room and flashed upon the little sleeper's brow, while a burst of celestial music sweeter and more thrilling than the carol of the early bird, was wafted into the room, and the little maiden started in her sleep at the, to her, unusual sound. Then, as the same rich music rose again in melodious cadence, the bright angel that had guarded her through the night, lightly swept his dewy wings across the brow and bosom of the sleeping child, and she opened her soft blue eyes and smiled with pleasure as the beautiful light of the morning met her half unconscious gaze; yet she knew not

* The Baptistery. Williams.

that an invisible guardian had been watching over her safety through the dark hours, or that he was still so near, for she had heard little of those ministering angels whom our Father sends to guide and guard the innocent and helpless. Her child's heart beat with delight in the sunshine, and revelled in the enjoyment of nature's beauty, but she had not yet learnt the existence of a brighter and spiritual creation, nor reflected on the watchful love and ever present care of Him by whom this present world and all things in it, "visible and invisible," are and were created.

The angelic music that had disturbed her slumber still filled her wondering ear with full and mingling harmonies, so that deep-toned and mellowed by distance, the very air seemed laden with the mysterious sound. It was indeed the music of angels, sweet and strange. For it was the matin bell of God's house, never heard in the village of Elfwin Abbots at that hour, since the time when the now ruined monastery of which a certain Saxon named Ælphwyne had once been abbot, reared its venerable walls in the midst of the thickly wooded dell below; yet so soft the charm with which it fell upon the entranced and listening ear, the lightest slumber

could scarcely have been broken by that cadence, had it not been as rare and unusual as it was beautiful. The cottage where Nelly lived, was a lonely spot, far from the old parish church, which indeed had long been falling to decay, and the square low meeting-house, to which her parents took her every Sunday, had no bell to waken the sleeping, or chide the tardy with its hallowed sound.

Little Ellen rose softly from her bed, and having with noiseless but eager steps, crept down the narrow and winding stair, for no one was yet stirring, she opened the cottage door and stood in the glad morning light. She listened for the music that had first awakened her, and again she heard the chiming bells, calling all Christians to rise and join the early Service, and, as their echoes swelled and died away and rose again, filling the hearts of the good and pious with happy thoughts, and whisperings that came from heaven.

All this however was strange to little Nelly. She had indeed often listened with curiosity and delight to her mother's tales of her own childhood, of the beautiful church in which she had once been used to worship, of the white-robed choristers and the mingling voices of priests and

people that rose in strains of grateful melody to heaven; but those tales had seemed to her more like dreams of fairyland, than aught having human reality, for she herself had never entered the gates of a consecrated building. So distant, as is too frequently the case, was the cottage in which she dwelt from the parish church, that many of the neighbours never even thought of attending it. Not long before Ellen's birth, a neat meeting-house had been erected in the village, and her father, who till then had never failed to be at church, once at least every Sunday, contrasted the bare damp walls of that old dilapidated building, the few chill seats assigned to the poor, and the high cushioned pews in which the rich ensconced themselves, with the clean dry meeting-house close at hand; the tight-fitting sash windows and bright little stove-fire, making the place, as the farmer averred, so warm, that he needed little fire at home after the evening service. Farmer Ashton, I say, weighed in his mind all these advantages and disadvantages; the solicitations of the dissenting preacher thrown into the scale, decided him, and after the christening of little Ellen he never again entered the church.

His wife however regretted the change, and often talked to her children of the holy place in which they had been christened and of the old church, which she had attended in her own happy childhood; of the Sunday school, and her favourite teacher; of the examination and the Christmas entertainment, and Midsummer merrymaking which succeeded, and were longed for even more than the prizes then distributed to the deserving.

All this little Nelly loved to hear, but to her it had seemed more like a dream than reality, till on this one sweet morning of spring, the bells rang out, and the thought, prompted perhaps by her angelic guardian, came into her mind that she would follow that distant sound and find the place whence it proceeded.

She wandered on through several meadows, and across a clear running stream, still guided by the sound of the bell, and had not walked far before she caught sight of a slender spire, with its gilded vane shining gloriously in the morning sun, above a cluster of tall and stately trees.

She uttered an exclamation of wonder and delight, for she recollected that her mother had

often talked to her of the tapering spire, and shining weathercock surmounting the venerable church which had been the cherished resort of her childhood, but while Nelly paused in wonder and delight the bells ceased, a clock was heard striking the quarters, and running hastily on, she soon found herself in a pretty nook surrounded with noble elms, in the midst of which there stood a newly erected church with open doors, inviting the traveller and wanderer, the wayfarer and weary in heart to enter those blessed doors, to rest and pray.

But Ellen did not know all that those open portals promised, and she stood for a moment under the heavy lych-gate of the churchyard, looking wistfully at one or two loiterers who were now hurrying to enter the church. When all were gone, little Ellen moved timidly onwards, wondering at the strange heads on the exterior of the building: the hideous animals and uncouth forms, fleeing as it were from the sacred edifice. Just as she entered the porch, a strain of solemn music swelled upon her ear, the voices of priest and people chanting the morning hymn; her unpractised mind and ear did not recognise the words, but the tone spoke intelligibly of

humble adoration, and grateful praise. Then the minister's solemn voice was heard in the low measured tones of reverence and devotion, which yet in the hushed silence of the worshippers around, fell distinctly on the attentive ear. Something whispered to her heart, (perhaps it was again the angel's voice,) that she was in the presence of God, and she bent her knees upon the cold stone pavement of the porch and clasped her little hands together, as she had been taught to do in her morning and evening prayer. Then the minister was silent, and again the worshippers joined in the service, and the clear sweet tones of children were heard, silvery and joyful as the song of angels.

The little listener was entranced: silent and motionless she knelt throughout the whole service until the voices within the sanctuary were also hushed; a solemn pause of silence followed, and then, by twos and threes, but all solemn, tranquil, and with countenances full of devout earnestness, the happy congregation issued from the church, and in passing, roused little Ellen from her dream-like trance. Yet still she moved not from the porch, for, although she longed to see the interior of the building she had so un-

expectedly discovered, an undefined sensation of awe restrained her childish curiosity; she felt that the place was holy, and paused instinctively upon the threshold.

When all the rest of the congregation had departed, a number of little girls came in a body from the church; they walked in pairs, each with her snow-white cap and apron, and a Bible and Prayer-book in her hand[b], and Ellen watched them crossing the churchyard to a pretty building with pointed roof and low arched door wreathed round with roses, where the village school was kept. Those then were the children whose voices had sounded so sweetly in the church, and earnestly our little maiden wished that she, like them, had been early taught to sing and make sweet melody in praise of God.

Full of these thoughts she scarcely noticed that a lady and little girl who passed her on their way to the school house, were gazing with surprise at her agitated, yet fair and thoughtful

[b] I noticed a train of dear children,
The school of the parish stood near;
And, led by a dame and a deacon,
They came—full of joy and of fear.
And each had a musical Psalter,
For these were the singers—
BALLAD OF LITTLE WOODMERE.

countenance. They soon questioned her as to her name and what had brought her thither, and the kind lady looked at her with the gentlest pity when told that till that morning little Nelly had never entered nor even seen a church, and she bade her little girl take her by the hand and lead her slowly and reverently round the building. And so, with hushed breath and timid step, the little creature passed through the oaken doors, with their long, scrolled and massive hinges; on her left, as she entered, was the font of richly sculptured stone, entwined on that day (for it was the Tuesday after Easter, and the Easter decorations had not yet been removed) with a wreath of snowy lilies, mingled with dark glossy leaves.

The little girl gazed at it with a half-suppressed exclamation of delight, but when she entered the nave, and looked towards the chancel, the glorious scene before her spoke so thrillingly to her senses, that after one moment of breathless astonishment, she would, but for the reverent demeanour of the little child whose hand she held, have darted up the nave to examine more closely the splendour of the altar. The lady looked at her with a gently reproving

smile, for in truth that church and altar were of no ordinary beauty. Every pillar was wreathed from the base to the summit with flowers and shining leaves, and long clustering garlands hung also from the richly carved screen, dividing the nave and chancel. The windows in the nave, and tall pillars supporting the roof, were sculptured and delicately ornamented, but within the screen all was more glorious far. There was much rich colouring about the stalls and reredos, and the fitful light admitted through panes of many-tinted glass, fell like a carpet of gems upon the chancel floor. The slender arches supporting the groined roof, rose far, far upwards, as if they aspired to reach the heaven, or at least, would thither lead the minds of all who gazed and marvelled at their wondrous height. The vaulted roof above the altar was painted of the deep blue of the sky, and glittering with innumerable stars of gold.

All that the imagination could picture to itself of gorgeous and divine; all beauty that the loving heart could lavish on the shrine of its fondest worship, had here been given; and if some deficiencies, occasioned by the lack of means to carry out all that the will desired,

might at other times have been detected, now all seemed ineffably radiant; for a long wreath of flowers was that day suspended above the altar; the rarest, the brightest and most fragrant of the season; and there too was the cross, the glorious symbol of our faith, formed of lilies like those that decked the font, but mingled with the rose's crimson light, and a few of the sad holy blossoms of the passion flower.

Ellen would have gone nearer to see and to examine all, but Mrs. Herbert checked her with a look of grave rebuke, and when they had left the church enquired if she knew not the peculiar holiness of that place, and that none but the ministers at the Communion, or Holy Sacrament, or the assembled communicants, might ordinarily enter there or ascend those steps.

Then little Ellen briefly narrated all her history, and how she had wandered thither, led only by the sound of the church bells' chime. Mrs. Herbert looked sad when she heard Ellen had never before entered a church, and explained to her that the one she had that day seen had been recently erected by a good and generous man, who loved the poor, and had built them a church, nearer to their own homes than that

which belonged originally to the parish, and which latter, besides, had not space sufficient to accommodate all the parishioners. She expressed an earnest hope that having now found her way thither, Ellen would in future be often present at the service.

Ellen longed to ask about the little girls and the school she had seen, but had scarcely courage at that first interview. The kind lady having promised soon to visit her parents in their humble cottage, now gently and kindly pressed her little hand and bade her hasten home, lest her father and mother should be alarmed at their little girl's unusual absence from the morning's meal.

CHAP. II.

THE NEW CHURCH.

"——— The church is oft disclosed to man
As a material temple wrought of stones,
Yet often as a glorious living form."

THE BAPTISTERY.

THE next morning, little Ellen was again early at the church, for her parents were easily satisfied with the reasons assigned for her absence on the previous morning; and although her father shrugged his shoulders when she asked if she might go again on the morrow, little Nelly's winning words soon gained him over to her side. Her mother, on her part, rejoiced with unfeigned gratification at Ellen's account of the new church so near their home, and which she hoped would soon entirely supersede the ugly and unmeaning meeting-house.

This morning our little girl arrived at the church door before the bell had ceased, and instead of remaining without in the porch, she slowly and reverently entered the house of God, and took her seat on one of the open benches near the little school-children.

She attentively watched their behaviour and listened with delight to their singing, but could not venture to join them, although she was soon able to recognise distinctly the words they chanted, and her heart breathed the response, although her lips were silent.

When prayers were over, and the congregation had departed, Ellen still lingered, gazing with wistful admiration at the beautiful things around her, but she remembered the lady's reproof, and ventured not to pass the screen, or ascend the steps leading to the altar. Mrs. Herbert, the lady who had spoken to Ellen on the previous morning, was again at church, and had seen her, and remarked her quiet demeanour during the service; when she observed her still looking round she took her hand, and with a smile of winning kindness, asked if she would like to go with her round the church and see every part of it. Little Ellen was delighted,

and they walked down the nave to the western or principal entrance, for the lady, who loved to see all things done in order, wished first to shew her little friend the font, placed just within the portal to signify the new birth and the entrance opened for us by Baptism, into the Church of Christ on earth.

As they stood beside the font, with its fair lily-wreath, and marked that the leaves and flowers had begun to droop and fade, for Easter had nearly passed, Mrs. Herbert talked to Ellen about the continual presence of God within those consecrated walls; and of the triune Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Some things the little girl had already learned, and she knew the history of our blessed Saviour's love in suffering and dying on the Cross for men. So reminding her of this, Mrs. Herbert bade her remark the form of the church, the nave and the two side aisles divided by lofty pillars, which, as she told her, were intended to remind all good Christians of the adorable Trinity; and the grand figure of the cross formed by nave, chancel, and transepts, and representing that on which our Saviour died. Of the different names distinguishing these several parts, our little girl of course

knew nothing, but she could see their form, and would never again behold a building similarly constructed, without remembering that it was intended to remind all loving hearts of the death and passion of our blessed Saviour. She told her also that the richly carved screen dividing the chancel from the nave, was to separate the holiest portion of the church; that in which the priests ministered, and where the Sacrament of the Eucharist was celebrated, from the outer part where the congregation knelt and prayed, and listened meekly to the Word of God, as proclaimed by His appointed minister. She bade her remark how beautiful was the adornment of that screen, and told her that each figure

"Of saints who had fought and achieved,"

had a history attached to it, and a meaning which, when little Ellen grew older and wiser, she too might be able to understand.

The three steps, ascending to the altar, again reminded her of the Trinity; Mrs. Herbert told Ellen she might walk softly and silently up the steps to look at the rich sculpture and painting of the reredos, or that portion above and behind the altar forming the altar-piece, and when they returned into the nave, explained to her,

that the stone seats with canopies of such exquisite tracery, were called sedilia, and set apart for the clergy, and that the oaken desks, placed lower down and richly adorned with open-work and carving, were for the choristers, the little boys whose white surplices and clear sweet voices had attracted Ellen's attention on her first entering the church that morning [a].

Mrs. Herbert further informed little Ellen that there was more, far more to be seen and described, in the chancel and around the altar, and that all those fair things had their peculiar meaning, which, if duly considered, would awaken in every heart solemn and reverential feelings. But they were mysteries too, which a little girl could not comprehend, for the deep truths they shadow forth cannot be fathomed even by others, unless the powers of the human intellect be aided and purified by the teaching of God's Holy Spirit. Then little Ellen looked earnestly and sadly in

[a] The mention of "white-robed choristers" in a country church, may strike some readers as unusual and surprising: yet the presence of surpliced choristers must not be supposed necessarily to involve the existence of a cathedral choir, for the writer believes there are instances, in which the school children, having been carefully trained by their masters, probably under the direction of the clergyman, have been found capable of executing the chants of the daily and weekly services. And it is much to be desired that the same plan should be more generally adopted.

the lady's face, and told her she feared she should never learn to comprehend them, for in the meeting-house to which she went, no such things were to be seen, and no one thought any building or part of a building could be better or holier than another. Mrs. Herbert enquired if Ellen had been christened, and, when she replied in the affirmative, promised her to call some day at her father's cottage, and request him to permit his little girl to attend the church and school daily, that she might learn all that in her baptism had been done and promised for her. Ellen did not quite understand Mrs. Herbert's meaning, but her heart bounded with joy at the idea of being received amongst the little school children whom she had seen in the morning, and learning with them to join in the prayers and chant the psalms.

When they were again in the porch, Mrs. Herbert desired Ellen to sit down by her side on the stone bench placed there for the accommodation of those who came from a distance to the church, and desiring little Ellen to look upwards, called her attention to a beautifully carved figure above the inner portal, of a man kneeling, in the midst of a crowd of other

figures, rude and ferocious in appearance, who were casting stones at him as he knelt. When little Ellen had remained for some minutes gazing on the sculpture, her kind friend explained to her that the church they were in had been built in honour of Saint Stephen, the first of that holy army of martyrs who died rather than renounce the faith of Christ; and that his martyrdom was there represented in order that all who sat down in that porch to rest, might remember the holy deeds of such saints and martyrs, and try in their own lives and conduct to imitate their glorious examples. Thinking that enough had been learnt for one day, Mrs. Herbert promised Ellen that on some other occasion she would speak to her further about the church and its ornaments, and also of the saints and blessed martyrs, but that now, if sufficiently rested, she had better return home, and perhaps in the course of the day she might call and talk to her parents about the school.

The day passed on however, and Mrs. Herbert did not visit Ellen's cottage, but her promise was not forgotten; on the following morning she came early and talked a long time with Mrs. Ashton about the Church, and the duty

imposed upon all baptized Christians, of worshipping constantly in that consecrated building, and duly attending the ministrations of God's appointed service. Little Ellen had already repeated to her parents all she had been told about the form of the church, and its ornaments and decorations, and their meaning. Mrs. Herbert now expressed her wish that Mrs. Ashton and her husband would allow little Ellen to come daily to the school, and hoped she would be able to spare her on Sundays also, and to come herself with her husband to the church; but she begged at least that the child might go to church, as indeed on no other terms could she be admitted into the school; and then pointing to the baby that lay sleeping in a cradle near its mother, Mrs. Herbert enquired whether it had been yet christened; Mrs. Ashton with some hesitation and embarrassment replied with downcast eyes in the negative, and having satisfied herself as to the fact of Ellen's baptism, Mrs. Herbert took her leave, promising to visit them again before long.

Little Ellen had no great difficulty in persuading Farmer Ashton to allow her to attend the school, and her delight when she first found herself enrolled amongst the number of the

children, and was taught to modulate her voice, and permitted like the others to intone the prayers and chant the psalms, was beyond description. A willing heart makes an apt scholar, and little Nelly was indeed so willing to learn, and loved her task so well, that it was not long before her voice was heard in tones as true and clear, as that of any among her little companions.

Nor was it the music only that she learned so quickly; her mind, childish though it might seem in its guileless simplicity, was in many points far beyond her years.

Alive to every impression of beauty, and responding readily to every sentiment of tenderness and devotion, her lively imagination was ever employed in tracing some new analogy between outward objects, the beautiful creations of nature or of art, and such high and holy truths as the minds of children, when carefully instructed, apprehend with even more adoring reverence and love, than do those who have gained that knowledge at a later period of life, for

> "Children here are wiser than ourselves;
> Imagination wakes in a new world
> Replete with wonders to the childish soul[b].

[b] The Baptistery.

Their minds are more malleable, their hearts more single, trustful and confiding, their little natures, like the buds in spring, are ever ready to expand to the genial warmth of the beautiful: for no sectarian prejudice, no false pride of intellect or worldly wisdom, has yet crept in to damp their pure and heavenly faith. In simple and undoubting reverence, they trust and love, wonder and believe.

Little Ellen daily carried home to her parents the lessons taught her at school or in the church, and it would have touched the hearts even of the most callous and indifferent, to mark her earnest loving eyes, fixed fondly on her parents, as she chanted the evening psalms, or to see her afterwards as kneeling with closed eyes and folded hands, she offered her prayer for protection during the night, and implored that God would send His holy angels to watch over her parents and breathe pure and happy thoughts into the hearts of all.

There was a poetry in the child's nature, in her words, her looks, her thoughts, which had a strange influence on all around her, unconscious as were their ruder minds whence that influence derived its origin: for it was not that alone

which fascinated them; it was a transparency and purity of nature, which the poetry of her temperament did but serve more beautifully to shadow forth, to common eyes. From the morning when she first knelt humbly in the outer porch of that church in which she now was daily seen, a love for holy things seemed to have taken possession of her heart, and absorbed her whole being. Whenever she could steal away from her playmates, and their noisy games, she was sure to be found in some quiet corner of the churchyard, perhaps sitting on the bench under the yew tree, which on Sundays in summer was occupied by the aged and poor, or on the steps of the churchyard cross, the symbol she best loved; or perhaps sometimes she ventured to enter the porch, or gazed reverently on the font, and tried in her childish way to unravel the meaning of the scriptural subjects sculptured on its sides. She loved also to study the curious painting in the great western window, in the centre of which was depicted the Nativity of our blessed Lord; a subject beautifully in harmony, as she afterwards learned to feel, with the font that stood so near. The birth of the Infant of Bethlehem being fitly placed in conjunction with the outward and

visible signs of that new birth unto righteousness granted to infants received into the Christian Church by the rite of Baptism. Sometimes too, and this was the greatest treat of all, she was allowed to assist in wreathing flowers, or tying them up in bouquets, to decorate the church on festival days; she often longed to remind her kind friend Mrs. Herbert, who never was absent on such occasions, of her promise, that on some future day she would tell her the whole history of the saints whose festivals were celebrated with so much reverence and love; but she checked herself with a self-constraint marvellous in a child of her years, and reflected that her benevolent instructress, who was so ready to give her pleasure in any form, could not have forgotten such a promise, and doubtless had good reasons for delaying its fulfilment. One day however a circumstance occurred which banished for a time all other thoughts and wishes.

CHAP. III.

THE CHRISTENING.

"At that blest fountain evermore
Calm faith, and holy hope doth spring,
And prayer bedews her wearied wing:
There many a bright and angel guest
With varied plume and changeful vest,
Shall lead thee on, and thence shall bring
To God's own mount, thy place of rest."

THE CATHEDRAL.

On entering the church one morning Ellen remarked something unusual in the arrangement of the font; the canopied covering was raised, and on a seat placed at a little distance, were two or three women, the youngest, and most interesting in appearance, holding a baby in her arms. One of the little school children whispered loud enough for Ellen to hear, "a christening!" and her heart beat quick with pleasure, mingled

with curiosity and awe, at the idea that she should now see the font made use of, and, more solemn still, be present while a little child was made a member of the Church, and having been cleansed in the purifying stream of Baptism from every taint of sin, accepted pure and regenerate into Christ's mystical body.

When the second lesson had been read the priest left the desk, and the beautiful baptismal service of our Church was duly performed. Ellen longed to have been nearer, that she might have seen the water three times sprinkled on the infant's brow, when those solemn words were uttered, "In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and watched the fingers of the clergyman as he traced upon it the symbol of the Cross, and bade him go forth, sealed by that holy sign, to combat manfully under Christ's banner, against sin, the world and the flesh, and continue His faithful soldier and servant unto the end.

As Ellen looked and listened, the thought of her little sister flashed upon her mind; and she remembered that her christening had not yet been thought of, that no holy water had ever washed from her the stain of guilt, that no

priestly hand had ever traced the seal of forgiveness on her forehead: and yet she was much older than the infant that day baptized. Ellen remembered having often heard her mother say that "baby was not nearly so strong as Nelly had been at the same age," and an undefined terror seized her, lest she should be ill, or perhaps die unchristened.

Never had the hours of school seemed irksome before; the mistress more than once remarked her wandering mind and unconnected answers. So strange a thing was it for Ellen to be idle or inattentive, that the mistress could not but attribute her absence of mind to illness, and kindly excusing her faults she sent her early home.

Ellen did not require a second bidding, but running rapidly into the cottage, asked with breathless eagerness if the baby were well, and before her mother had time to answer, had clasped the little creature in her arms. The child quickly recognised its sister's well-known voice, and her cry of infantine delight quite removed Nelly's fears, yet the relief to her mind was so great that she burst into tears, and lavished on her dearly loved little sister a thousand

kisses and endearments, while the child laughed and screamed, and Mrs. Ashton looked on wondering what could have occasioned Ellen's agitation.

Ellen detailed to her mother the ceremony she had that morning seen performed in the church, and told her how sadly she had been alarmed lest baby should be ill or die before her christening; and again and again, she in her innocent simplicity asked when the ceremony was to take place, and why poor baby had never yet been taken to the church. Mrs. Ashton was not sorry to witness her little daughter's eagerness, for the subject was one on which she had of late spoken very frequently with her husband. Since they had occasionally attended the church, and been visited by the good clergyman, the thought of their neglect in that particular had weighed heavily upon her mind. The clergyman too had urged it as a duty, and but a day or two before, when he called and found her husband at home, had spoken so earnestly to him, and represented in such strong colours, the risk and danger incurred by delaying the performance of that sacred duty, that her husband was more than half persuaded to consent. Sooth to say, on the christening of his child

depended more than the fulfilment of that one duty, important as it was. It involved his separation from the body of dissenters with whom he had for some years been connected, and his return into the communion of the Church, that loving mother whose arms were already opened to receive him.

Yet this it was that withheld him; he liked not the idea of being reproached by his former companions with bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and blind submission to those who were set in authority over him. He had learned in the dissenting congregation to speak lightly on sacred subjects, to ridicule ceremonial observances, and to despise the ordinances which he once loved and reverenced. Still, even now, the good principles early implanted in his breast, exerted a certain influence upon his mind. After going for a few Sundays to the church, the vulgar familiarity of the meeting-house became almost revolting, and as he listened to the wild rhapsody of the preacher he wondered he could ever have imagined such an harangue better, or more profitable to his soul, than the few searching solemn words, uttered by the parish priest, and which seemed to pierce to the very

depths of his heart, laying bare its inmost secrets, bidding him root up from it all pride and self-will, and other plants of worldly growth, and try the temporary flashes of excitement, on which he had raised false hopes of his own spiritual condition, by the unfailing test of their fruits, enquiring strictly whether those fruits had been in him, a holy and religious life, a heart at peace with God and in charity with men.

Farmer Ashton was already more than half inclined to decide in favour of the christening, and when he came home that evening his wife's account of Nelly's agitation and her innocent questions and entreaties, soon gained his full consent; before bed-time he had promised on the following day to consult the clergyman, and determined that as soon as sponsors could be found, the christening should take place; and that same evening the name even was decided upon, which was to be Amy.

A happy night it was for Ellen; she slept but little, and to her simple prayer for parents and sister, she added unbidden another petition; that "Amy might be specially preserved from all evil and danger."

One glance at her bright eyes and sunny

smile when she entered the school-room in the morning assured her kind mistress that all was right, and Ellen's happiness was so great, that she quickly communicated to all around her the happy circumstances that occasioned it.

Friends willing to hold the office of godfather and godmothers, were soon found, and the day fixed for the christening; and now little Ellen dreamed and thought of nothing else, hoping above all that the sun would shine upon that happy day, for the autumn was fast drawing to a close, and there had been piercing winds and heavy rains for some weeks past.

That day however the sun rose bright and cloudless, and the sky was as blue and serene as even Nelly could have desired. Farmer Ashton and his wife in their best apparel, accompanied by the godfather and godmothers, were in the church in good time for the early service, and little Ellen was on that day allowed the privilege of holding her sister in her arms. As she thought of the time when she first beheld that church and font, she almost wondered that what was now so dear and familiar could then have appeared so completely strange. But the second lesson was over; the minister approach-

ed the font, and with clear and impressive voice rehearsed the Baptismal Service; then he took the child from Ellen's arms, and a thrill of joy crept through her frame as he uttered the solemn words, "Amy, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." She saw the holy water streaming over that baby-brow; she watched his fingers tracing upon it the symbol of the cross, and in her inmost heart she murmured a prayer, that she might be able to set dear Amy a good example, and help her as far as might be in her power to keep unsullied the baptismal grace that day bestowed upon her. The font was filled with water up to the very brim, and the sun shining brightly through the many-tinted window, was reflected in a thousand varying gem-like colours upon its surface.

The radiant countenance of Ellen, and the sweet but wondering smile of the baby, who shrank not, nor cried as the cold pure stream descended upon her forehead, formed a picture not unworthy of a painter's hand. Beautiful and refreshing was it to the heart of the good clergyman, and to Mrs. Herbert, who herself was one of the godmothers. When the service was over, and the baby's name and age entered

in the baptismal register, the farmer with many respectful and grateful acknowledgments expressed his sense of the kindness and interest shewn by Mrs. Herbert and the clergyman; and the former gave Ellen a Bible in large print, and a book of beautiful Outlines of Scriptural subjects, telling her that she must shew them to her little sister and explain their history; and that some day, when she was older, she might teach her to read the Bible, which was to be Amy's peculiar property.

Then they turned their steps homeward with happy and contented hearts, and Ellen was never weary of caressing her father, and asking him to rejoice with her that little Amy also had been made a Christian.

CHAP. IV.

THE FIRST SORROW.

Most holy Mother, by a new birth thine—
Thine by baptismal grace and sacred sign,—
Nursed on thy breast, as in thine arms, she died.
CHURCHYARD THOUGHTS, CCIII.

WEEKS passed quickly away, and Ellen was always at school, the happiest of the happy; but after a time the mistress remarked that she sometimes looked sad, and though her lessons were always perfectly repeated, and her attention undistracted, she was seldom seen after school-hours were over.

At church her silvery voice was heard as sweetly as ever, but there was something melancholy in its cadence, unlike the clear joyous music it had breathed before.

The school-mistress was not long in discovering the cause of this change. Ellen's little sister was ill, and had been so for many days, almost weeks.

The father, who loved his children dearly, sometimes said she had caught cold on the day of the christening, but this Ellen would not allow for a moment; still, whatever might be the cause, poor baby had for some time been ill, and wasting away, and every moment that Ellen could snatch from her attendance at school, was devoted to her little sister; she carried her in her arms to the sunniest corner of the window, and there would nurse her for hours when the day was fine, singing and talking to her; and often when she had soothed her to sleep with some holy hymn, or chant, she would place her softly in her cradle, and kneeling down beside it, pray that she might be relieved from pain, and made well and strong again.

At first it was hoped that when the chill wintry days had passed away, little Amy would revive, and in time be able to walk with her in the fields and lanes, or sit down on the soft mossy bank while Ellen climbed higher into the wood to gather for her the early flowers, which she herself most loved. Ellen did indeed gather those sweet spring flowers, the earliest of the season, but Amy neither saw their beauty nor inhaled their fragrance. What are the loveliest of earth's

flowers compared with those which bloom in paradise! but we must not anticipate.

The hopes Ellen had entertained grew fainter every day; little Amy pined and wasted to a shadow, but without a murmur or fretful complaint; the seal of heaven seemed indeed to have been set upon her brow, and her sweet placid countenance was like an angel's in its serene loveliness. She suffered but little pain, yet day by day grew weaker and more wasted.

Ellen nursed her with a devotedness that was beyond all praise; a new power seemed to have arisen in her heart; all other pursuits and pleasures were relinquished, lest Amy should wake and miss the smile she loved, or be restless and weary, and need Ellen's voice to soothe her to repose. Rarely did she quit the house, except each morning at the hour of daily service, for she loved to pray for her sister amid the assembled congregation, some of whom she fondly thought might add their prayers to hers. She had heard that persons who were sick sometimes desired the prayers of the Church, and after much irresolution and many vain attempts she summoned courage to ask the clergyman if their little Amy might be remembered in the common

supplication. Gladly he acceded to her request, and many a heart responded fervently to the petition that had been prefaced by little Amy's name.

But the prayers of the Church were not in this case to be granted. God was recalling to Himself the spirit, whom He had sanctified and purified in the waters of Baptism, ere yet the taint of sin or defilement had passed upon the pure regenerate soul. And truly, all who looked on that childish face, seemed to recognise the presence of a power higher than aught of earthly origin. It was as if the very angel, whose office it was to guard and guide her early years, had quitted his bright place in heaven, where, as Christ Himself hath taught us, "he beheld continually the face of the Father," and come to dwell in and to animate that frail earthly tenement, that so all men might recognise the blessed influence of the holy baptismal stream, purifying, chastening, and subduing the wayward tempers and childish petulance of infant years.

These may have been fancies, engendered by the passionate affection of the human heart, but in the mind of little Ellen they dwelt with all the force of reality. She ceased to hope, nay

almost to wish, that her sister might be spared, and looked forward to her departure as to that of an angel returning to its sphere, only hoping that with every passing year she might herself become more pure and perfect in word and deed, and more like the blessed pattern set before her in her Saviour's life and death, so that at last her communion with her sister might be renewed, at least in spirit upon earth, and in the perfection of knowledge, when both should by God's grace be numbered among the blessed in heaven.

This thought it was that enabled Ellen to watch so patiently beside her sister; to tend her, as she daily grew weaker and weaker with such unremitting watchfulness and love, stifling, or rather completely setting aside her own sorrow in her care for others. She strove to cheer her mother, by whispering in her ear the same bright hopes which lifted her, child as she was, above that lowly cradle of mortality into the glories of an unseen world; for she knew that angel-wings might be hovering round the cradle, and she fancied angel-arms were outspread to welcome that returning soul and bear it to the bosom of eternal love.

And when at last the breathing, so low, painful and irregular, came fitfully and at still longer intervals; when each faint pulse beat more and more feebly still, and the eyes, that while consciousness remained, turned instinctively towards Ellen, grew dim and glassy, and fixed in the cold glance of death: then, full as was her little heart of the anguish of that first grief,—and how strange and awful to a young child must be the first sight of death, how acute the pang of a separation, which it could scarcely yet have realized in thought, a departure holding out no glad hopes of a return;—even then Nelly's streaming eyes were raised hopefully on her sorrowing parents, and she whispered to them a verse she dearly loved to repeat to herself, "They shall see His face, and His Name shall be in their foreheads."

The clergyman who had christened little Amy, and Mrs. Herbert herself, hastened to comfort the family in their affliction, and although farmer Ashton at first blamed the christening, as the immediate cause of little Amy's decline and death, he was at length persuaded to see things in a better light, and acknowledged that had his child died unbaptized, the pang would have been

deeper and more bitter far than that inflicted by her loss alone. As time rolled on, their grief abated; it became a blessed and happy thought both to himself and to his wife, that some portion of what had been their earthly treasure was now laid up for them in heaven. They seemed to love more entirely the service of God, when the thought arose in their minds, that in Paradise her blessed spirit prayed in communion with theirs, and many an hour of happy converse upon things divine did they spend in the quiet churchyard beside the grave of their child.

So holy and chastening is the influence of sorrow on the human heart. And how fared it with our little Ellen? What thoughts were hers, as she viewed the grassy mound beneath which her only sister lay at rest? She had loved her with no common childish love, and she sorrowed for her with no light passing sorrow. Day by day, and night by night, the thought of Amy was present to her heart as something too holy and too sacred to be mixed up with the transient pleasures or sorrows of the day. She took part in all as before, but with a meek and chastened grace, and more dearly than ever did she love to steal from all around her to some silent spot,

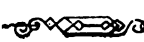
where she might in thought hold communion with Amy. Each opening flower of spring reminded her of the pale wintry blossoms that had been placed on Amy's bosom in her coffin. Eagerly she sought for the first unfolding buds, and long ere others knew that the leaves even were bursting from their wintry prison, wreaths and garlands of flowers, twined by Ellen's hand with loving care, were to be seen decking little Amy's grave. You might almost have fancied, so early and so constantly were those odorous wreaths suspended there, that, in the words of the beautiful Christian ballad,

"Such things
Do only grow from tears,"

for however few might be found elsewhere, seldom was that grave without its garland, fresh and bright and fragrant, as if nurtured in the perpetual summer of the paradise of God.

But there are other, better gifts, that spring like flowers from tears. We know not how near to every one among us may be the blessed spirits of those whom we have loved, and to Ellen's lively imagination and sensitive heart, the idea of Amy's presence was almost a reality. It was a new and spiritual bond, linking her with

things invisible and divine, and forming a perpetual spring of holy and solemn thoughts. Nor were these thoughts without influence on her outward life, and indeed on her whole character and conduct. Day by day she became more humble, earnest, and devout, more patient and self-denying, more full of love to others and forgetfulness of self. The years of her early childhood were not indeed exempt from faults and failings; for to such, all in their earthly pilgrimage are liable, and childhood must have its discipline or it will never bring forth the fruits of a holy and happy maturity; but still free by God's grace from the darker and more grievous sins. She ever carried in her heart, the one cherished hope of meeting Amy in heaven, of being known and visited by her blessed spirit while on earth. And thus she walked, as it were, in a holy and spiritual atmosphere, chastened and sanctified by the blessed influence of that first great grief, blended as it was with hallowed memories of the happy day of her sister's christening, and of the entrance which had been thereby secured for her, into the presence of the God of gods in Zion.



The Matin Bell.

PART II.

CHAP. V.

THE SPRING.

"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary."

HEB. IX. 1.

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear upon the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come."

SONG OF SOLOMON, II. 11, 12.

MANY months had passed away since little Amy's death; the glad Christmas season had twice faded into the gloom of Lent, and the glory of the Easter sun had dried on many a cheek the soul-reviving drops of penitential tears. Nelly had followed the Church in her holy round of discipline and rejoicing on many a happy day, kept holy in remembrance of signal mercies vouchsafed by Christ to His Church, or in commemoration of Apostles, Saints and Martyrs, who had

borne witness to the truths they taught, in torture, imprisonment, and death. Little Ellen had been amongst the earliest at the church, anxious that not a wreath should be twined, not a letter formed without her participation. Greatly indeed would that little hand have been missed, and many an older, wiser head might more easily have been spared; Nelly's delicate fingers were ever the most active and skilful; her eye the quickest in selecting flowers whose blended hues would most harmoniously combine, and her heart seemed gifted with a wondrous power of discernment, to read aright the spiritual meaning of the figures and emblems, which Mrs. Herbert and other ladies who loved their church designed for its decoration. When the dark and mournful Lenten hangings were removed, those joyful and glorious words, "The Lord is risen," were traced in flowers above the altar; and immediately below them was suspended a cross, not formed, as at Christmas, of evergreens, and the bright berries of the wintry holly, but of the snowy flowers of the camellia, symbolizing, as little Nelly quickly divined, the ineffable purity and holiness of our crucified Redeemer; while the deep red crown above it, crimsoned,

as it were, by the memory of His precious blood-shedding, forbade His servants to forget, even in the fulness of their Easter joy, the costly treasure, the priceless gift, with which their ransom had been sealed. As Ellen gazed upon that Cross, and the words of Holy Scripture displayed above it, her heart was filled even to overflowing. The memory of Amy returned at that holy season with deeper power, yet ah! how full, not of sadness but of hope! What balm was there in those few words first uttered by an angel's lips, to the holy women, who early sought the sepulchre where Jesus had been laid! How dear a consolation have they ever since afforded to the departing soul and to all around who weep that soul's departure. While Ellen looked, she crept closer to Mrs. Herbert, and timidly asked, how it happened that flowers, so beautiful, yet so perishable, have always been regarded as the most appropriate decoration for churches upon the day on which our Lord rose triumphant from the tomb.

"They make me think, as I look at them," said Ellen, "of the beautiful verse I learned this morning at school." "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.

Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out her dead." (Isaiah xxvi. 19.)

"It is indeed a beautiful verse," said Mrs. Herbert, "and well suited to this holy Season, for the power of Christ's resurrection calls back the soul from the dark prison-house of death, just as the golden drops of morning dew awaken from their winter's sleep the flowers of spring, and clothe them anew with life, beauty, and fragrance."

Then Mrs. Herbert allowed Nelly to sit down with her near the chancel steps, while she described the decorations of a church which she had once visited at Easter, at the same time explaining to her the reasons which made such tokens of gladness at that season peculiarly appropriate. First observing that Christmas, the Festival of our blessed Lord's Nativity, has ever been regarded as a season when the church, in its outward appearance, may fitly reflect the joy and gratitude of faithful hearts, Mrs. Herbert next dwelt on the even more glorious event commemorated at Easter, as requiring that the outward marks of joy should be yet more abundantly displayed. She pointed to the words above the

Altar, the salutation with which, as Ellen knew, holy men in days long passed away were wont to address each other on an Easter morning, and bade her remark how beautifully in harmony with that old custom was the mute greeting addressed by those words to all who entered the church, breathed into their hearts, and embalmed as it were in their minds, by the fragrance of flowers and the soft beauty of their varied blossoms.

The church which Mrs. Herbert was describing had been thus adorned, and it was the first time she had ever beheld similar decorations. No words, as she said, could express the delightful emotion which thrilled through her heart, as when slowly entering its hallowed walls on a brilliant Easter morning, before the mid-day heat had blighted one petal of the flowers which had been suspended late on the preceding evening, she raised her eyes to the Altar, and saw above it, "The Lord is risen." Involuntarily the response broke from her lips, "He is risen indeed." The Altar was duly spread with a fair linen cloth; flowers were wreathed around the richly carved ornaments of the reredos; the monogram of our blessed Saviour , the

triangle and other symbols designating the blessed Trinity, or the divine Redeemer, were there assembled; but amid all those fair forms, the eyes and hearts of many, if not of all the worshippers in that holy fane turned with deeper devotion to those eternal words on which hung their hopes of everlasting life,—the promise of their salvation. Yet the joy they inspired, blending with the remembrance of that bitter anguish and suffering of their Lord, which during the past week all had striven more or less to realize to their souls, kindled in every heart a more fervent desire to dedicate themselves anew, body, soul, and spirit, to the service of their risen Lord.

Nelly listened in breathless attention, entreating Mrs. Herbert to describe the other decorations of that church, and she then heard that affixed to the pulpit were the emblematic letters of our Saviour's title of Redeemer, I. H. S., (Jesus Hominum Salvator[a],) formed of flowers relieved by the intermixture of a few dark glossy leaves. From the middle of the central letter, the H., there rose a slender cross, formed entirely

[a] Or as more correctly understood now, three Greek letters forming an abbreviation of the name JESUS, the cross above having been originally the circumflex or sign of abbreviation used by manuscript writers.

of rare and bright-hued exotics, for in that church and happy congregation there were none who feared to see the symbol of their faith hallowing every consecrated spot, and at each moment recalling to mind the suffering and triumph, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, of their Lord and Saviour. From the slender pinnacles of the richly carved screen, dividing the sanctuary from the nave, hung long light wreaths of delicate flowers, many of them the wild children of the field and forest; primroses, violets, bluebells, and the pale anemone, for in the early spring not many flowers are to be found, and the choicest had been reserved for the chancel and Altar. Besides, although the principle is good which prompts us to bestow our most costly gifts on places of especial sanctity, there is something beautifully appropriate in the idea of decking the House of God with 'those wild fragrant blossoms, which, although unnurtured and uncared for by man,' spring up at His bidding in lone and tranquil spots far from the stir of the world and the fitful fever of human existence. Brought from their mossy banks and shaded hedgerows, they hang for a brief space in the holy House of Him by whom they were made

so fair, and then as the poet of the early Church has beautifully said,

> " Amid the solemn hymns of saints
> They breathe their souls away."

As the fresh spring breeze, entering at the open doors, waved those long wreaths to and fro, the air around was interpenetrated with perfume, and sweet odours were wafted upwards, nature's fair incense symbolizing the mingled prayers of priests and people, and ascending with them in one general incense-cloud to heaven. " And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand [b]."

" How much I should like," exclaimed little Ellen, " to pass every day of my life in decking our church with such beautiful wreaths and emblems !" Mrs. Herbert looked gravely at the little girl, as she replied, " Was it thus, think you, that our blessed Saviour's days were passed?" " But there were no churches then," said Ellen, with a look of surprise. " There were no churches, it is true," answered her kind friend, but the temple was a divinely appointed place of worship, and thither our Saviour constantly

[b] Rev. viii. 4.

repaired at the appointed seasons; still it was not in the temple that His life was passed; it was not even in solitary prayer and meditation; although in these duties, so necessary to us, He condescended to engage, thus leaving us an example that we should follow. Beautiful and delightful as is the occupation of adorning the church within whose walls we worship, it must be remembered that Christians have higher duties to perform. Instructive though it may be to trace the similitudes existing between the various parts of our holy buildings and the doctrines of Christianity, and to learn the lessons they were designed by holy men of old to teach, we must bear in mind that the object of those lessons is to display more vividly the picture set before us in our divine Master's life, and encourage us to make Him more constantly our pattern, and go about as He did, doing good, and ministering to all who are sick or in sorrow."

This idea had not always been sufficiently present to Ellen's mind; she would gladly have spent day after day in listening to Mrs. Herbert's instructions, or herself drawing simple lessons from every beautiful object around; but, although ready when any particular occasion de-

manded exertion, to sacrifice even her dearest pleasures for the benefit of others, her's was not a mind that sought actively for opportunities of usefulness. This Mrs. Herbert had noticed, and although deeply sensible of the value of those habits of heavenly contemplation by which the soul is nurtured to dwell amongst things divine, and hold communion with the spiritual world, she knew that such contemplation if indulged without restraint, instead of sending forth its votaries with renewed strength for the performance of their daily duties, soon becomes but empty dreaming, a delusion and a snare.

Little Nelly's position rendered her more liable to such a danger than would generally be supposed possible with one of her class; her parents had now no other child, and her mother was well able to take upon herself all the cares of their little household. Nelly, too, was so unlike other children of the same age and station, that it seemed to have been tacitly agreed by all who knew her, that she should be allowed to follow the bent of her own inclinations. Mrs. Ashton, happy in being the mother of a child so loving, pure-minded, docile and obedient, felt little inclined to murmur, although she certainly obtained

less assistance from her in her household labours than some of her neighbours required of their girls. Mrs. Herbert, however, saw that this was a false state of things, which she was too judicious and right-minded to encourage. A thousand accidents might occur to alter Ellen's position. Illness might interrupt her father's daily labours, or render her mother incapable of attending to her household concerns, and it would prove a far more serious trial to poor Ellen, to be called on suddenly, unprepared and ignorant, to fill her place, than to be early and gradually trained in habits of domestic usefulness and economy.

It had hitherto been Nelly's constant custom, when afternoon school was over, instead of returning home with the other children, to wander into the churchyard and there sit musing on her little sister's grave; or perhaps she met with Mrs. Herbert, and passed many happy moments in listening to her conversation and treasuring up in her mind all that she taught her. On this day, however, Mrs. Herbert reminded her that she had other duties to perform, if she desired to follow her blessed Saviour's steps to heaven: and that it was His pleasure that every passing day should be hallowed by special acts

of love to others; by common duties faithfully performed, and kindness shewn to our neighbours, or the poor; all of which He in His infinite mercy will accept as done unto Himself.

Ellen was sensible of the justice of her kind friend's admonitions, and before she left her that evening it was agreed that their conversations, so delightful to Nelly, should henceforth be reserved, as a peculiar indulgence, for festivals and holy days, and that the time hitherto devoted to them should be occupied by Nelly in assisting her mother, and learning to perform such light household-duties as were suited to her strength and capacity.

CHAP. VI.

THE COUSINS.

AROUND each pure domestic shrine
Bright flowers of Eden bloom and twine,
  Our hearths are altars all;
The prayers of hungry souls and poor,
Like armed angels at the door,
  Our unseen foes appal.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

LITTLE Ellen walked slowly home, pondering on what Mrs. Herbert had said, and when she reached the cottage, finding, contrary to custom, that her mother had not returned, she began immediately to act upon her suggestions; placed the kettle on the fire, drew the little table near the window, so that the setting April sun might shine upon it through the now unsheltered casement, and arranged everything in due order

ready for her mother on her return. She ran too a little way down the lane, to a bank from which she had that morning gathered primroses to twine a fresh garland for little Amy's grave, and soon returned with a beautiful bouquet of anemones, primroses, and wild hyacinths to deck their humble tea-table. Her mother was gone to the nearest market and post town to fetch a letter which she expected to receive from her mother, who never since she first left home had neglected to send her that Easter greeting, and when she returned, wearied with her long walk, Ellen was delighted to shew her that everything was prepared, and that she had now only to sit down and rest. When her father soon afterwards returned from his day's work, Ellen made the tea, performed all the duties of the table, and felt so happy in being useful, that she quite wondered she had never before thought of returning early to assist her mother, or prepare for her when she chanced to be absent. In the course of the same evening Mrs. Ashton, calling Nelly to her side, whispered into her ear that her grandmother was soon coming to pay them a visit, a pleasure which they had long been anticipating, and Nelly, who had never

seen her grandmother, was full of delight at the idea.

The Saturday before St. Mark's day had been fixed for her arrival, and Ellen felt in some trepidation lest her coming should interfere with the treat she anticipated in seeing Mrs. Herbert on that day. When Saturday came, however, and the good old dame arrived, having been driven over by a kind neighbour from the town near which she lived, Nelly no longer felt the slightest fear lest any of her pleasures should be abridged on her grandmother's account. Her voice and smile were full of gentleness; she clasped Nelly's mother in her arms while tears of joy ran down her aged cheeks, and laying her hand upon her grandchild's head, blessed her solemnly and tenderly, and prayed that she might prove as great a comfort to her parents, as her own daughter, Nelly's mother, had been to her. The comfortable arm-chair was soon drawn out, and granny seated with all due ceremony with her back to the light, and her feet supported by a soft carpet footstool, and then for the first time Ellen looked round, and observed a tall pale girl, who had arrived with granny and was now standing timidly by the door, as if doubtful

whether she should be considered an intruder or not. Ellen read this in her attitude and the expression of her countenance, and with that quick perception of the feelings of others which so remarkably distinguished her, and the dread of wounding them even by accident, sprang forward and seized her hand, the strong resemblance between her and her own mother, leading her at once to conclude that she must be her cousin.

Farmer Ashton, who had just then entered the house, and stood at the open door, exclaimed, "Ah Nelly, what happiness for you to have a companion, an elder sister to walk with and talk to!" Nelly's eyes filled suddenly with tears; she thought of Amy, and as a second glance at the little girl shewed her that she was dressed in deep mourning, "Is your sister dead too?" asked Nelly, in accents of the tenderest sympathy. "Had she been christened? My Amy was christened, and now she is in paradise; will you be my sister instead, and teach me as I would have taught Amy if she had lived?" The girl kissed Nelly tenderly, and bursting into tears, exclaimed, "I never had a sister, and now I have no mother!"

Nelly was silent. To have no mother! it was a grief almost beyond her comprehension, and she could only throw her arms round her cousin's neck, and mingle tears with her caresses.

Granny's kind but low and tremulous voice, was soon heard calling little Mary to her aunt, and Mrs. Ashton was delighted to welcome the orphan child of her favourite sister. This sister had married some years before Mrs. Ashton, and left her home to reside in London; but her health soon suffered from the closeness of the city, and after several years of constant illness she died, leaving only one daughter, Mary, then about thirteen years of age; her other children had all died very young. Mary had been her mother's sole attendant through many a weary hour of sickness and pain, and her death left her indeed very desolate, for her father, although tenderly attached to his wife and children, was too much occupied to be much with them. He had therefore sent Mary down to her grandmother, and the latter was now glad of this opportunity of bringing her over to make the acquaintance of her aunt and cousin.

Nelly's delight at the prospect of having a new sister and companion was unbounded; they

walked, played, and read together; they went hand in hand to church on Sunday, and Ellen soon proposed that Mary should go with her to Mrs. Herbert on St. Mark's day, to learn something more of the meaning of the different parts of the church, and also of the history of St. Mark, which they were taught in school. Mary was very shy, and at first wished to decline the offer, but Ellen was so urgent in her persuasions, and Mrs. Herbert looked so kind and gentle, that the timid girl at last consented, and she sat down near Amy's grave while her cousin went to ask permission. Ellen soon returned, bringing with her a cordial assent, and even the expression of a hope that while she remained, Mary would accompany her daily to school. Ellen shewed her cousin the violets purpling the sod around Amy's resting-place, and told her that few days passed without her bringing some garland freshly twined to hang upon the lowly headstone, or wreath around the simple cross. "Flowers," said Nelly, "are so beautiful, they always remind me of Amy, and when I see their bright leaves withering on the ground, I remember that although she too faded like an early flower, her body will not lie in the

earth for ever, but rise more and more beautiful and glorious in the blessed day of resurrection."

Mary had often indulged in thoughts like these, although she rarely gave them utterance. She was a well-disposed little girl, and had always been taken regularly by her parents to the old church near which they lived in the city. Her mother had taught her to regard with reverential love, everything connected with the house and service of God; and now she told Ellen how often she had wished that her dear mother's grave was not within the cold damp precincts of a London churchyard; but then, she added, it was close to the church which her mother had always attended, and in which prayers had been offered for her during her long illness. The good clergyman of the parish was with her mother when she died, and had often, in his previous visits, when she regretted that she could not be laid to rest near the same church in which she had been christened, said, that those who died in humble reliance on their Saviour's redeeming grace, would rise alike to glory, whether from the dark sunless streets of crowded cities, the deep bosom of the ocean wave, or the tranquil village church-

yard, where flowers bloom above the dead, and birds sing sweetly in the trees around. They would have lingered longer, enjoying the sweet calm of the evening, but Nelly suddenly remembered that she had intended to be at home earlier than usual, and hastily returning, they reached the cottage in time to prepare the simple evening meal before Mrs. Ashton and granny returned from their walk.

CHAP. VII.

ST. MARK'S DAY.

"WHO knows not how with God's appointed days
The Hebrew Church her solemn feasts combin'd,
By Christ approv'd; and with her Saviour's praise
His one Church Catholic succeeding twin'd,
Thanks for His humble saints; and how her mind
Declares one Holy Mother, not asham'd
To speak with honour meet of men design'd
Her's and her children's guides, however blam'd
In evil days, perchance by evil tongues defam'd."

THE MATIN BELL; OR, THE CHURCH'S CALL TO DAILY PRAYER.

As the children walked together to school on St. Mark's day, Ellen learned from Mary much that she had never before heard about that holy man. That he was an Evangelist and a Martyr Ellen knew. She also remembered to have heard that he had been converted by St. Peter, and had written his Gospel from the dictation of that inspired Apostle. The cousins arrived early at the school-house, and as they sat

in the porch waiting till the other children assembled, Mary shewed her little cousin a charming book which had been given her before she left London by the mistress of the school in which she had been brought up. It contained histories of the saints, and turning to St. Mark's day, Mary shewed Nelly a picture of that Evangelist, clad in pontifical robes, as bishop of Alexandria; one hand raised in the act of benediction, the other grasping the book of his Gospel. By his side stood a winged lion, which Nelly immediately recognised as the symbol of St. Mark, for she had often observed his figure, with that of the other three Evangelists, in the side windows of the choir. Mary read aloud all that was said of the history of St. Mark, and they learned that after writing his Gospel, he preached for twelve years in the land of Egypt, and at length founded the Church of Alexandria in that country, of which he subsequently became the first bishop. But wicked men enraged at the holiness of his life, and his numerous miracles, stirred up tumults in the city, and seizing him even while ministering at the altar, tied his feet with cords, and dragged him in their cruel rage through the streets of

the city, over rocks and stony highways, till bruised and tortured, he at length expired in agony. Hence in paintings of St. Mark there is usually represented in the back ground his effigy dragged by the heels in the manner above described, and by which circumstance he may be quickly and certainly recognised. The holy martyr was buried by the faithful band of devoted Christians with many tears, and the place of his sepulture was long held in veneration at Alexandria. After many years had rolled away the holy remains were carried from Alexandria to Venice, and St. Mark has ever since been regarded as the patron saint of that city and republic.

Before they quitted the church after morning service, Ellen pointed out to Mary the figure of St. Mark, and the lion, his peculiar symbol, in the side windows of the choir. St. Matthew too was there, with the symbolic angel by his side; St. Luke and the ox; St. John with an eagle, and holding in one hand the Gospel volume, in the other a chalice from which a serpent is seen to rise. Neither of the girls could understand the meaning of this singular emblem, but when Mrs. Herbert joined them, she related to them the interesting legend which has occasioned the intro-

duction of both chalice and serpent in pictures of St. John.

On one occasion, when about to administer the Sacrament at Rome, a hired assassin poisoned the wine contained in that sacred vessel, hoping thereby to slay the Apostle; but God and good angels were watching over that holy man, and when the wine was consecrated, the legend says that the poison was expelled from the cup, and appeared visibly in the form of a serpent, thus symbolizing the evil one through whose agency alone a crime so awful and sacrilegious could have been devised or perpetrated. St. John drank of the cup himself, and administered it to the other communicants without injury to any. In remembrance of this his miraculous preservation, a chalice and serpent are frequently placed by artists in the hand of St. John; the eagle and book referring to his twofold-character of Apostle and Evangelist.

Ellen now ventured to enquire, why, besides the martyrdom of St. Stephen sculptured above the door of the principal entrance of the church, the tortures inflicted upon the saints were so frequently represented on the carved work ornamenting the vaulted entrance. Mrs. Herbert

reminded her of one of her first lessons; that the material structure of the church was destined to shadow forth the immaterial edifice of Christ's spiritual Church, both militant and triumphant; or, in other words, to exemplify the entire course of a Christian's life, from his first admission into the Church by Baptism, to his final passage through the grave and gate of death, into the glories of the Redeemer's kingdom in heaven; while at the same time every separate part, and all the minor details, are made effective in carrying out some grand doctrine or precept.

At the very summit of the principal door was placed the figure of our Saviour in an oblong kind of frame, called an aureole, or glory; His head surrounded by a circle, styled the nimbus, and marked with a cross in token of His divinity; the cruciform nimbus being assigned to the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity alone. Both the aureole and nimbus are intended to represent the luminous rays emanating from the glorious person of Christ. The former those of the entire body, the latter of the head only[a]. The Saviour's right hand was raised, the thumb

[a] For ample details on this interesting subject, see Didron's *Iconographie de Dieu.*

and two first fingers open, the third and fourth closed, in the act of benediction, or, as if inviting all men to pass the hallowed threshold, and, entering the House of God, become incorporated with the mystical body of the Church, through Him, who when on earth addressed His disciples and the whole human family in these words, "I am the door of the sheep." (St. John x. 7.) And again, (v. 9,) "I am the door, by Me if any man enter in, he shall go in and out, and find pasture." Mrs. Herbert reminded her little listeners that Christ had also warned His followers that they must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts xiv. 22.) And the sculptured figures on the doorway, representing saints and martyrs who had given their bodies to death for His sake, were practical illustrations of those divine words, and proofs of their faith in the gracious promise that, "If we suffer we shall also reign with Him." (2 Tim. ii. 12.)

The children recognised, amongst other subjects, St. Peter nailed to the cross with his head downwards as he had desired, not deeming it meet that the servant should suffer in the same position as his Lord. St. Catherine, easily known

by her constant attribute, the wheel, the intended instrument of her martyrdom, and the memory of which is preserved also in the "rose," or, as they are frequently termed, "Catherine wheel" windows in our churches. St. Barbara, meekly kneeling, while her infuriate father stands with sword upraised, ready to sever at one stroke the fair head from her spotless body. St. Thomas also was there, surrounded by strange eastern figures, and sinking at the foot of the Cross, in which was all his hope, while one amongst his persecutors, more savage than the rest, pierces him with a lance. Hence, said Mrs. Herbert, although, blessed be God, no swords are now uplifted, no lances raised to smite the servants of the Crucified, we may learn that it will be their lot to endure for His sake many hard and painful trials, performing cheerfully all duties, however unpleasing, and bearing sorrows meekly, whether they proceed immediately from Him, or are inflicted through the agency of man. All are to be endured as for His sake whose sufferings for us far exceed the utmost power of the human imagination to conceive.

Mrs. Herbert next explained why the ground-

plan of a church ought always to lie due east and west, the chancel and altar being systematically placed at the eastern end. Long before our Saviour's birth He was called by the prophet Isaiah the "Sun of Righteousness;" and earlier still, Balaam had designated him as the "Star of Jacob." Therefore the early Church turned towards the east in prayer, as to the source and fountain of light. It was in the east too that, when Christ Himself was born, the star appeared which guided the Magi to his feet.

"The gentlest, holiest star
That ever beam'd upon the earth,
Found in the east its place of birth;
It will not come again, that ray;
It told its tale and passed away!
But Christians have a wondrous art,
A power of vision in the heart,
Which brings again before the eye
The miracles of days gone by;
And as the stain of crimson light
Falls on the chancel's hallow'd floor,
That star comes back upon the sight,
Telling its tale of love once more."

VOICES OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

So the altar at which our priests officiate, and on which the eucharistic sacrifice is laid, is at the eastern end of the church, and thither we turn, to greet the beams of that glorious Sun,

who has now risen upon the world, with peace and healing on His wings. Mrs. Herbert made her little pupils observe also, that the nave, less richly ornamented than the chancel with sculpture and painting, presents an image of the Church militant on earth, as the chancel and altar symbolize the Church triumphant in heaven; a lofty screen is raised between the two, because, not till their warfare is accomplished can members of the earthly Church be received into actual communion with the heavenly. Upon that screen, called the rood-screen, the figure of our Saviour suspended on the cross or rood, was, in ancient times, sculptured; and sometimes in the present day words of Scripture, alike conveying the idea of the entrance into life purchased for us by the death and passion of our blessed Saviour, are painted on the screen, or on coloured scrolls around the chancel-arch. Mary, at Mrs. Herbert's request, read aloud the sentence engraven on the chancel-arch before them. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;" and the signification of the screen and chancel was at once made clear to the minds of both.

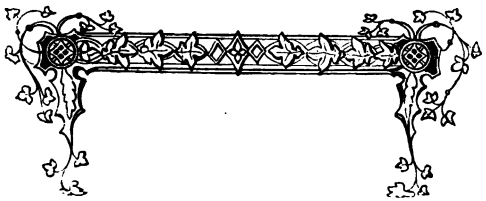
Many groups of small figures were carved in

the panelling of the screen, and Mrs. Herbert pointed out, as illustrating the triumphs of the cross, a figure of St. Michael the archangel, engaged in deadly combat with the dragon, the arch-type of evil: another of St. Margaret, who, as we are told, subdued the devil in his serpent or dragon-like form, by simply touching him with the cross, and stood sublime in meekness and in strength while her fearful foe struggled vainly against the power which held him bound and captive. There was also a representation of St. James being dragged away by the enraged Jews; it is said of him that his serene demeanour in that moment of agony, so wrought upon the heart of one amidst the throng, that kneeling at the Apostle's feet he entreated to be allowed to follow him to torture and to death. St. Cecilia too was to be seen, her bosom pierced with three wounds, and an angel hovering near, bearing a crown of lilies to typify her spotless innocence and purity.

As the themes of martyrdom sculptured on the church's portal, are intended to prepare Christ's followers to bear

> "The cross of gold, of silver, or of wood,
> Or of mean straw, hid in each form of life,"

so these of triumph are given to encourage mankind to persevere unto the end, following those glorious examples, and by faith in their crucified Lord, and a holy walking in His steps, gain, like them, an entrance into His blessed kingdom, of which by Baptism they are made inheritors.



CHAP. VIII.

THE VIGIL OF ST. BARNABAS.

REPENTANCE is the lowly door
That leads to yon baptismal well,
Which hath its source where angels dwell.

CATHEDRAL.

MARY Sandford was about two years older than her cousin Nelly, sensible and affectionate, and ready to listen to and sympathize with many of Nelly's dreams and fancies. She had been carefully brought up, and early inured to those habits of self-denial which form one of the first duties of a Christian, and when practised in the trifling occurrences of daily life, are little noted by others, but invaluable in themselves, as giving stability and firmness to the character, and communicating a power of endurance and self-government which no other earthly means are equally efficacious in implanting. Long attendance on

her mother, and the continual confinement of a London life, had given Mary habits of regular thoughtful occupation, and her example soon produced good effects on Nelly's excitable and dreamy nature. It was therefore with sincere pleasure that Mrs. Herbert heard it had been decided that she should remain for a year, at least, an inmate of her aunt's cottage.

Mrs. Herbert had formed a plan for engaging the daughters of farmers, and of such among the cottagers as were in tolerably comfortable circumstances, to visit the poorest classes regularly, and minister, as far as might be, to their necessities. She expected to find Mary's assistance very valuable in carrying her scheme into effect, and, in truth, she and Nelly were soon the most active members of this society of infant sisters of mercy. They taught the younger children, read to the parents, carried them food and medicine, and sometimes articles of clothing which Mrs. Herbert purchased or assisted them in making. One of the cottages which it fell to their lot to visit was occupied by a poor woman, named Woodley, who had long been suffering from a painful and lingering disorder. Her eldest girl was fourteen years old and called Eliza,

but she had never been christened, and the clergyman and Mrs. Herbert had vainly endeavoured to convince both mother and daughter of the necessity of fulfilling this solemn duty. The former, rendered passive by illness, offered less opposition than the girl herself, who had imbibed too much of the bold license of the age, and was hardly restrained, even by Mrs. Herbert's presence, from repeating the rude taunts and contemptuous language she heard from her associates.

Yet, strange as it may appear, little Ellen had an influence over her mind which no one else possessed. Once only had she ventured on a profane remark in her presence, and then the expression of awe and horror in little Nelly's countenance as she entreated her to forbear, touched some responsive chord in that rude nature which had never yet been awakened. Since that day Ellen had never willingly made allusion to any sacred subject, yet more than once Eliza Woodley had led her to speak on such themes, by recurring to her little sister Amy, of whose christening and death Ellen loved so much to speak; yet Ellen's heart was full of tender pity for the unbaptized girl, and so com-

pletely were all other feelings absorbed in that sentiment, that she seemed scarcely sensible of the rude coarseness of Eliza's manners and character, which under any other circumstances would have excited in her mind sensations of repugnance if not of disgust.

Eliza Woodley had for some weeks past been confined to her bed by an attack of fever, and Mary and Ellen went on their mission of mercy to the cottage to enquire whether her mother needed their assistance, but as they entered the sick chamber, screams of delirium and moans of anguish reached their ears, and they found that the fever had since their last visit gained a fearful height.

It was terrible to witness the agony of the poor sufferer: her mind was crowded with images of the most hideous and awful nature. Every dark passion and evil thought in which her soul had indulged when mistress of its powers, seemed now to write itself in characters of fire upon her brain; the sting of every unrepented sin planted itself deeply in her heart; every light word and profane jest that she had uttered rose up like spectres round her feverish pillow, and all human aid seemed powerless to relieve or comfort.

Neither her mother, nor the nurse employed by the parish to attend upon her, had the slightest influence with her, or could prevail on her to taste the medicines, or submit to the soothing remedies prescribed by the doctor. It was as if some dark struggle were going on within her, some fearful contest between the powers of light and darkness, and as yet it remained doubtful whether the physical frame, torn and bleeding like that of the demoniac among the tombs, would be able to abide the issue of the conflict, or, worn out by that long agony, sink beneath the strife, and thus fall for ever under the dominion of the prince of darkness. Yet even in this fearful moment little Ellen's presence retained its soothing charm. She approached the bed gently, attempting to moisten the sick girl's lips and lave her burning forehead, and although her screams at first redoubled, and she wildly forbade her to approach, some thrill of consciousness was awakened by the gentle accents and soft loving eyes of that little messenger of mercy, for murmuring incoherent words of angels sent to do deeds of charity on earth, she suffered Ellen to sprinkle the refreshing liquid on her cheeks and brow. Then suddenly thrusting her aside,

she shrieked in tones of agonizing horror, "Away, away, you dare not minister to me!" and as her fevered fancy peopled the vacant space around with fearful countenances and forms of unearthly horror, shrieks of alternate rage and terror burst from her lips, till nature exhausted sank beneath the struggle, and she lay motionless, and to all appearance devoid of life.

Mary wished her cousin to return home, and promised that she would assist the nurse in her attendance on the poor sufferer, but no persuasions could induce Nelly to neglect her self-imposed duty for a moment; she only had found it possible to approach Eliza in her paroxysms, and the mother seemed as if all her hopes of her child's recovery centered in Ellen. With tears in her eyes she entreated her to remain for one night at least, it would in all probability be the last on which human assistance could avail the apparently dying girl.

And Ellen stayed, and watched alone beside her bed. It was a beautful night in June; the eve of the Feast of St. Barnabas. Exhausted by successive paroxysms of delirium, Eliza lay in a state of unconsciousness. Nelly had ven-

tured to bathe her lips and brow with some cooling liquid, and she seemed for the moment almost tranquil. Midnight was approaching, and while the pale soft moonlight filled that silent chamber, sweet scents and dewy odours, "that died as they were born, in sighing," were wafted through the open casement.

Strange was the contrast between the dewy freshness of the still evening air and the hot feverish atmosphere of the sick room! Yet not more strange than that offered by the dark unquiet form of Eliza Woodley, as from time to time she started from her pillow, and with features distorted by pain and fear gazed wildly into vacancy, and the calm angelic figure of little Ellen, who was kneeling near the uncurtained casement. A bright flood of moonlight streamed upon her upturned face and folded hands, so that she seemed as if encompassed by a halo of unearthly radiance.

She was praying with earnest simple devotion for the unblessed sufferer beside whom she watched. She knew that the crisis was fast approaching; that a few hours would in all probability seal her eternal doom, and tears rolled down her cheeks as, shuddering, she thought

that the unhappy girl would die unbaptized. The hours of the night rolled on, and still there was no change; the paroxysms had indeed become less violent, but that might betoken the loss of physical strength alone. Still Ellen knelt in ceaseless prayer till the moonlight died away, like the noiseless steps of some departing angel, and the pale cold light of morning broke. The village clock had told the hours through that long melancholy night, and as the sun's first rays purpled the east a gladsome chime pealed from the old church tower, and Ellen remembered that it was the Festival of Saint Barnabas, the son of consolation, as that name beautifully signifies; (Acts iv. 36.) and humbly she thanked her Saviour, that she, according to her poor ability, had been permitted to perform some slight work of love for His sake. As the sound of the bells swept by upon the morning breeze, they seemed to Ellen even more musical than of yore. And as she listened, her fancy almost changed the hallowed tones into hymns of praise, wafted thither from the courts where angels dwell. Again and more fervently she prayed for the unconscious sufferer on whose ear that music fell unheard, but, as ever and anon her eyes

turned anxiously towards the couch on which she lay, it seemed to her that her brow became less fearfully contracted, the crimson on the cheek less intense and lurid in its hue, her frame too was motionless, her eyes closed. Ellen turned away, and a sickening chill crept over her, for she thought the hour of death was come, and how fearful would have been his presence by the pillow of the unbaptized! But ere she could hurry from the room to warn the nurse and mother of the change, Eliza's eyes slowly opened, and they were raised, no longer with a vacant wandering gaze, to Nelly's face; deep awe and fear were in that glance, for reason had resumed her sway. She strove to speak, but her parched lips and tongue refused to perform their office.

Nelly raised to her lips the composing draught which she had been desired to administer as soon as the crisis of the disease should arrive, but Eliza did but taste it, and then in faint and hollow tones, she murmured, "the hand of death is come! Oh," and her countenance assumed something of the fearful horror it had worn throughout her illness, "must I die unbaptized!"

"No no," exclaimed Ellen, eagerly: then check-

ing her impetuosity, she added, "sleep till I return, but first drink this, it will give you strength!" and as Eliza Woodley without resistance swallowed the remainder of the draught, and lay back upon her pillow, Ellen hastened from the room, bade the nurse attend upon their patient, and explaining in a few hurried words the change that had taken place, ran without a moment's delay to the church.

Morning prayers were scarcely over, and the few minutes Nelly waited in the porch seemed to her like hours. Yet, in truth, ere one hour had elapsed, the clergyman stood with her at the bedside of Eliza Woodley. She had not slept, and her restless eyes had been fixed incessantly upon the door by which they were to enter. Few were the questions the clergyman could venture to ask in the state in which he found her, but her desire for baptism was, as he hoped, a blessed wish, prompted by heavenly agency. The consecrated water was sprinkled on her face, the holy symbol traced upon her brow, and Nelly bent her head upon her hands, to conceal the tears of joy with which she welcomed that long wandering sister to her heart, for it had seemed as if the faint spark of life

must become extinct, even before the necessary ceremonial of the holy rite could be performed. Once only, it was when the hand of the priest traced on her brow the holy sign, Eliza raised her eyes to heaven, and all who stood there marked the wondrous change that had come over them, and the expression of humble gratitude which supplanted their former bold and scornful brightness. When the ceremony was concluded, the clergyman departed, promising to return ere long, but the sufferer heard him not, and lay seemingly unconscious of every thing that passed. Nelly remained by her side, counting the faint throbbings of her feeble pulse, and by degrees her breathing became more calm and regular: a slight moisture was perceptible in the hand she clasped within her own: at length Eliza slept, the crisis was past, and Ellen who had prayed so fervently that she might be a Christian ere she died, now mingled with her grateful thanksgiving the supplication that she might live, and learn to walk worthily in the vocation to which she had now been called.

CHAP. IX.

HOLY THOUGHTS.

Light are their steps, who in life's earliest dawn
The mountain tops of heavenly life ascend,
Brushing the dew-drops from the spangled lawn,
Nor ever from the straighter path descend,
Fixing their eyes upon their journey's end.
Sweetest, best thoughts are their's, such as have striven
With childhood, and with dawning conscience blend,
To flee all other love but that of heaven,
Ere weigh'd to earth with sin, and much to be forgiven!

THE BAPTISTERY.

ELIZA Woodley soon regained her accustomed health and strength, and the power of baptismal grace was strikingly manifested in her altered character and conduct. She was deeply grateful to little Ellen, and seemed to regard her with a feeling of almost reverential love, as a being who, in comparison with herself, was all purity and goodness. The excitement and terror of that

eventful night left their impression upon Ellen long after Eliza had recovered; a frame so delicate and fragile as hers was too easily shaken by strong feeling or emotion, and fear, anxiety, and joy had all been crowded into the few brief hours of the vigil of St. Barnabas. Many weeks elapsed before her spirits regained their former elasticity, and even then she was more unwilling than ever to break through her habits of solitary meditation, even though urged by Mary, whom she dearly loved. Other feelings, too, were busy at her heart, and on a subject which she might justly deem entitled to the deepest and most earnest thought. She was looking forward to the time when she should be of an age to be confirmed, and hoped that at the next Confirmation held by the bishop in their neighbourhood, she might, as she would then be in her fifteenth year, be admitted as a candidate for participation in that holy office. Her cousin Mary, she knew, was then to be confirmed, and Nelly seemed instinctively led to bind more closely the links of human love, by connecting them with the dearer, holier bonds of spiritual communion. The Confirmation was to take place in about two years' time, and Nelly anticipated it with ear-

nest hope mingled with deep fear and awe. To be for the first time permitted to approach the Altar on which she had hitherto gazed with distant reverence; to renew in her own person the vows made for her at her baptism; to hear the Bishop's solemn voice pronounce the blessing, and feel his apostolic hand laid on her veiled head: these were thoughts calculated to fill a mind like Nelly's during many a long hour of solitary musing and reflection. How much more, then, the recollection of what was immediately to succeed: her participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion! But this is a theme of which it would be premature to speak at present, and which is too sacred to be briefly noticed. Suffice it to say, that during the two years which were to elapse between the period at which we now leave our little heroine, and that appointed for the Confirmation, solemn thoughts were with her day by day. Full of love for others, and renunciation of self, practising self-denial in little things, and thus nerving her mind for its conflict with sterner foes, she lived a sweet and holy life.

Gentle, loving, and obedient, her girlhood was marked by the same tokens of heavenly guardian-

ship and angelic care which had made her early childhood so beautiful to witness. Eliza Woodley, too, hardened as she had once been, seemed since her christening to have been gifted with new perceptions, and a more humble childlike heart. Coarse and rude as was her natural disposition, she yet strove to learn and practise something of that holiness and purity which mark the members of Christ's spotless Church. She also looked forward to the expiration of the two years, as a period, when if the intermediate time were duly improved by her, she might be admitted as a candidate for Confirmation, and on many a golden summer eve, or bright autumnal morning, as Mary and Nelly talked together in earnest tones of the duty of preparation for that rite, and all the solemn vows then to be ratified, Eliza Woodley would take a seat at a little distance, drinking in their words, which seemed to her heart as if spoken by angelic voices; and thus the three children, different as they were in almost every other point, became united in the closest and most endearing bonds; making it their constant aim, their daily endeavour, by earnest efforts on their own part, and dutiful submission to the teaching of their spiritual pastor, to become meet for the

sacred rites in which they hoped together to be partakers; the ceremony of Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Holy Communion.

OXFORD:
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The

Village Choristers.

The

Village Choristers.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE MATIN BELL," "THE PSALTER AND THE GOSPEL," ETC.

"THEY WHO STAND ON THE 'SEA OF GLASS MINGLED WITH FIRE' HAVE THE 'HARPS OF GOD' IN THEIR HANDS; THEY SING THE SONG OF MOSES, THE SERVANT OF GOD, AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB; WHY THEN SHOULD MUSIC BE EVER OUT OF PLACE WITH THOSE WHOSE AFFECTIONS ARE ABOVE?"

SERMON BY THE REV. H. MELVILL, B.D.

OXFORD AND LONDON:

JOHN HENRY PARKER.

M DCCC LIV.

CHAP. I.

THE WANDERERS.

"Red o'er the forest peers the setting sun,
The line of yellow light dies fast away
That crown'd the eastern copse: and chill and dun,
Falls on the moor the brief November day."
Christian Year.

"WILL you give a night's lodging to a poor little boy and his sick mother—for the love of the good God?" said a sweet childish voice from the threshold of farmer Wood's comfortable kitchen, which was filled with such a glow of warm firelight, that the very snow on the sill of the uncurtained window looked ruddy in the reflection.

"Come in my little man," said the farmer, who was just shaking the snow-flakes from his rough great coat; "this is no weather for women and children to be out in, be they sick or well. But where is your mother?" he added,

as a little fair boy of about nine years old slowly pushed open the heavy door, and stood pale and shivering before the sturdy yeoman, on whose round good-humoured face his blue eyes were fixed with an expression of earnest and trustful entreaty. "She was too weak, too tired," said the child, "to walk any further, and she sent me on to beg that you would give us shelter for one night, and to-morrow we will go on to Plymouth; she is only two or three fields away, and I can fetch her in a moment." A few more enquiries elicited the fact that the poor child's mother, fainting from fatigue and exhaustion, had been compelled to rest awhile under the shelter of a hay-rick, while she sent her child on in the direction of the light they had seen at a distance, hoping it might proceed from some hospitable cottage. They had travelled many miles on foot since morning, and as the dull November evening closed in with sleet and driving snow, had completely lost all traces of the pathway they had before been following, till the distant bells chiming for evening service guided them in the direction of the village; and they at length descried the light in farmer Wood's kitchen.

Before the child had finished speaking farmer Wood was again buttoned to the chin in his shaggy coat, and looking kindly into the poor boy's thin anxious face, he bade the farm-servant bring him at once a slice of bread and cheese; "Eat that quickly my lad," said he, "for we must be off in search of your poor sick mother." The child's eagerness was too great to allow of his taking even a second mouthful, and the farmer, active though he was, could do little more than keep pace with him, as they hurried back to the spot where he had left his mother. There she was, poor thing, lying white and cold as if the hand of death were already on her, and the good farmer, after one glance at the inanimate form, lifted her in his arms and hurried back to the house as quickly as he had left it.

She revived a little when she felt the warmth of the fire, before which she was laid on a rough sort of couch, hastily prepared for her by Mrs. Wood's charitable care, and a few drops of brandy with which they moistened her lips and chafed her numbed hands and feet, soon restored her to something like animation. She opened her dim eyes and looked around be-

wildered and half frightened, till she felt her boy's cheek pressed against her own, as he nestled to her side. She saw the bowl of warm bread and milk, as yet untasted, which the farmer's wife had prepared, and with a mute expression of gratitude signed to the child to take it, yielding with a faint smile to his obstinate determination to put some into her lips before any passed his own. She seemed herself too weak and ill to take anything but a cup of warm tea, and Mrs. Wood, seeing that rest was what she most needed at that moment, judiciously prepared a bed at once, and having persuaded her to swallow a few drops of some warm cordial of her own making, soon had the satisfaction of seeing her asleep, with her child in her bosom. When she looked in for the last time to enquire if the poor wanderer needed anything before she herself retired for the night, she found her awake and conscious, though still very weak, and overpowered with gratitude and emotion. Mrs. Wood wished to silence her at once, bidding her sleep, and forget all trouble until the morning, but she begged so hard to be allowed to say a few words, that her kind hostess could not but consent to listen.

Her first anxiety was to know whether there were any good clergyman in that neighbourhood, and if it would be possible for her to see him early on the following morning. "Ay, is there indeed," said good Mrs. Wood, "and never was there a man or woman yet, sick or sorrowful, that parson Butler was not ready to visit, night or day."

"God be thanked," said the poor sufferer; and on Mrs. Wood assuring her that one of the farm labourers should be sent over to him the first thing in the morning, Mrs. Dunsford, so the poor woman was called, promised to keep quiet, and try and compose herself again to sleep. "The blessing of the widow and the fatherless be upon you!" said she; "such I and my poor child are no doubt by this time, but God's will be done; praise be to His holy name for all His mercies!"

She was soon sleeping, the dull heavy sleep of weariness and exhaustion, but the large tears that found their way through her closed eyelashes and stood on her wasted cheek seemed to say, "Sorrowful dreamer, this is not rest!"

Before Mrs. Wood was quite dressed in the morning she was told that the boy, little Edwyn Dunsford, had been asking to see her, and wished

her to come as quickly as might be to his mother. She found the child looking quite another being after his warm quiet sleep, but the poor mother was in a state of utter exhaustion. It seemed even doubtful whether her strength would not fail before the clergyman's arrival, and she wished to tell her sad history to Mrs. Wood while equal to the exertion. This was a great distress to Mrs. Wood, who, having lived all her life long in the same quiet village, knew little of the real trials and bitter calamities of life, but she thought how very grievous a thing it would be for that poor woman to die, and leave her young child amongst strangers and in a strange place, where no one knew or cared for him; so she composed herself to listen, and assist if possible; for to hear of distress, and not endeavour to relieve it, was indeed impossible either to the farmer or Mrs. Wood.

Mrs. Dunsford had been married to a soldier, who, just before her first child was born, was obliged to leave her to follow his regiment, promising that she should join him as soon as she could undertake the journey. The regiment to which he belonged was ordered to Ireland, and she with her baby of a few weeks old in her

arms travelled to Holyhead, hoping there to receive the remittance, and directions which would enable her to rejoin him. None came, however. Day after day she turned her weary steps to the post-office,—always without success. Many months of fear and anxiety had worn her to a shadow, yet still she struggled to maintain herself and her baby by hard work, preferring to endure any hardships rather than leave the only place where she could hope to obtain tidings of her husband.

Once, after a year or two had passed away, she met a man whom she recognised as an old comrade of her husband's, but he shook his head in answer to her eager enquiries, and only bade her be thankful she was rid of him, and not trust to having any help from him for the future.

And so, for upwards of nine long years, she had lived on with that burden at her heart; the pang of a life-long separation that seemed worse than death, rendered sharper still by the fear lest death should make the separation eternal.

Mrs. Dunsford met with a kind friend at Holyhead, who not only assisted her in her

endeavours to gain a livelihood, but taught her also where to look for comfort in her deep sorrow and trial. The Church's prayers, the Church's ordinances, proved to her a source of comfort and instruction; and her little boy, as soon as he was old enough to lisp his father's name, was taught to join with her in prayer for that absent parent. It seemed at length as if the prayers of so many years were about to be favourably answered;—a letter from a clergyman at Plymouth had been received by a gentleman at Holyhead, making particular enquiries for a person of her name, and the circumstance being mentioned to Mr. Stanley, the clergyman in whose parish Mrs. Dunsford resided, he found that a man, a soldier, of that name, was lying dangerously ill at Plymouth, that he seemed a sincere penitent, and was deeply anxious to gain tidings of a wife whom he had deserted many years before, and to obtain her forgiveness before he died.

He waited only to know whether she were still living, and so far inclined to pardon his great wrong to her that she would consent to undertake a journey to Plymouth to see him once more: and he would then send her all the

money he could procure to defray the expense of the journey. Above all he begged earnestly that an answer of some sort might be sent without delay.

A week at least had elapsed before Mrs. Dunsford heard of the letter, and so intense was her anxiety to be with her penitent and dying husband, that she waited not for the promised remittance, but gathering together all the little money she could, started at once upon her painful journey. On the same day she sent a letter to her husband assuring him of her entire forgiveness, telling him that by the time the letter reached him she should be already far on her road to Plymouth, and begging him to send the promised remittance to a town which she named, as her own slender means would not suffice to carry her further on her road.

She arrived there, almost worn out by the jolting of the rude conveyance in which they travelled, for suffering and toil had severely shaken a frame never remarkably robust, and her heart sank within her on finding neither letter nor remittance. For one day longer she waited, but in vain, and then, fearing that her own letter had miscarried, or her hus-

band been too ill or too poor to send; losing sight of everything besides, in her intense fear lest he should die without her having seen him, die while in doubt of her forgiveness, and without knowing how deeply and dearly she had loved him through all, she set forth on foot on her long weary journey, trusting that what remained of her slender pittance might be sufficient to last her until they reached Plymouth.

The undertaking was madness; the hope one that could not without a miracle have been realized, and when she sank at last, overpowered with fatigue, under the haystack in farmer Wood's field, she felt that the hand of death was on her, and that she must surely leave her child among strangers, in a place where no one knew her or her melancholy history.

Yet Mrs. Dunsford's faith forsook her not, even at that trying moment; she had commended her child to the care of Him who is the Father of the fatherless;—the church bell, like an angel's voice, had guided her so near to the hospitable roof of farmer Wood, that the light from his windows was plainly seen, and the sound of the bells at that hour, reminding her of the evening prayer in her own dear

parish church, seemed to promise that hearts, bound by the same communion and owning the same laws, would there also be found. Nor was she deceived. When she sank exhausted on her pillow, after having related thus much of her sad history to the kind and sympathising Mrs. Wood, the latter bade her rest assured that God's good providence had guided her to that spot, and that her child would find friends both in her husband and herself, and in the good parish priest, who, she doubted not, would either send him to his father, or if needful provide for him in some other way.

"May God in heaven bless you!" said the poor mother faintly but fervently. "Did you tell the clergyman," she asked, "that a poor dying woman entreated his prayers and comfort?"

"He will come, I hope, to pray with you, and bring you health as well as consolation, if it be God's holy will," said kind Mrs. Wood with reverent cheerfulness; "but you must take a little nourishment and lie down to sleep, that you may have strength to speak to him when he arrives. Here, my child," she continued, as little Edwyn, his pale cheeks rosy with the heat of the fire and the warm breakfast he had enjoyed,

came softly into the room and laid his cheek upon his mother's, "lie down on the bed, and coax your mammy to sleep until our good clergyman comes to make her better."

"Will he indeed make her better?" asked the poor child, fixing on her those deep earnest eyes, which seemed almost too intelligent and thoughtful for a child of his years. "Oh! if it were but our own Mr. Stanley!" he said, clasping his hands, and the mother, drawing her treasure to her bosom, slept once more in peace and trusting love.

CHAP. II.

REST FOR THE WEARY.

"Snatched sudden from the avenging rod,
Safe in the bosom of thy God,
How wilt thou then look back and smile,
On thoughts that bitterest seem'd erewhile,
And bless the pangs that made thee see,
This was no world of rest for thee!"

Christian Year.

Mrs. Dunsford was still sleeping when Mr. Butler arrived, and Mrs. Wood wished not to disturb her until she had related the chief particulars of her story. Her anxious ear however soon caught the sound of voices, and she sent Edwyn down to enquire if the clergyman were there, and whether she might be so bold as to ask him to come up to her without delay.

"She thinks, poor woman," said Mrs. Wood in a low voice, "that her hours are numbered, and seems to count the moments until she can see a clergyman: she is so fearful of losing

and I hope," she added, laying her hand fondly on his head, "that he will always remember his mother's last prayer, and try to love and serve God, and be obedient to his masters and teachers, whoever they may be."

The child's only answer was a stifled sob, as he raised his head, and pressed her hand to his loving lips. Mrs. Dunsford was nearly exhausted.

"I can say but little more now," she whispered, "the letters will explain all;—oh Sir, if I might—" She looked imploringly at the clergyman, who read her thoughts.

"You are truly penitent for all the sins of your past life?" he asked in a low solemn voice.

"Have you a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, and a thankful remembrance of His death?"

She bowed a mute, yet fervent assent.

"Are you in charity with all men?" He asked again, in a gentle yet impressive voice, "With your husband?"

"God bless him," said she fervently, her streaming eyes uplifted, and her hands passionately clasped.

"Even if, which God forbid, it should be in

any way his fault that you received no letter as you expected?"

"May God forgive him as I do," she repeated, faintly yet distinctly, "and, my child," she continued, as she drew his head into her bosom, "never forget to pray for your father, and if you ever see him, tell him that I loved him to the last." Mr. Butler asked no other questions, the necessary preparations were made, and Edwyn, kneeling at a distance, watched with silent awe the solemn ceremonial.

> "The simple altar by the bed
> For high Communion meetly spread,
> Chalice, and priest, and snowy vest."

And in that humble room, there were present even at that moment, doubt it not, a spiritual throng of unseen and heavenly visitants, bending their bright forms in voiceless adoration, or, when the prayers of the priest,

> "ruffled the wings prepared for instant aid,"

waving their golden censers, as they wafted heavenwards the supplications of the faithful.

The solemn feast was over, the lips of God's authorized messenger had spoken peace to the

departing soul, and, faint from the exertion, poor Mrs. Dunsford lay silently, with eyes closed almost as if sleeping. A faint movement of the hand attracted her child's attention, and as he caught her meaning, he looked half doubtfully at the clergyman, and then in a sweet but faltering voice, gathering strength as he proceeded, those childish lips, more meet than any other earthly music to herald in the songs of angels, poured forth in tones of simple melody one of his mother's favourite hymns,

The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar—
Who follows in His train?

Who best can drink His cup of woe
Triumphant over pain;
Who patient bears His cross below,
He follows in His train.

The martyr first, whose eagle eye
Could pierce beyond the grave;
Who saw his master in the sky,
And call'd on Him to save.

Like Him, with pardon on His tongue
In midst of mortal pain,
He pray'd for them that did the wrong:—
Who follows in His train?

A noble army,—men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around their Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light array'd.

They climb'd the steep ascent of heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train!

The strain was ended, the listeners stood hushed around the bed; the mother's eyes were closed, and her lips motionless; her faint breathing became gradually fainter and fainter, her heart's slow beating more and more feeble still, and so she "fell asleep," and with her child's voice yet sounding in her ears, passed to join the songs of angels and the choir of the seraphim.

Little Edwyn's grief, although deep, was unobtrusive. He scarcely seemed to realize the idea of actual separation from his mother, even

when the simple funeral was over, and her body laid in the quiet churchyard, for Mrs. Dunsford, with a deep thoughtful love rarely seen amongst women of her rank in life, had long looked forward to the time when her child would in all probability be left an orphan, perhaps amongst strangers, and had accustomed him to think of her death as of an inevitable, but temporary separation. She had reminded him that she should, as she humbly hoped, be at rest with the same merciful God and Father by Whom his childish steps would still be directed, and Who if only he strove to do His will, would bring him at length to that paradise which none but the holy and the redeemed may enter.

Mr. Butler's first care was to make enquiry at Plymouth for Edwyn's father, and on writing to the clergyman there, he learned, what indeed he had half feared might be the case, that his hasty penitence had been induced only by dangerous illness and had evaporated on the appearance of more favourable symptoms.

Whether Dunsford had or had not received any letter from his wife seemed uncertain, but he had suddenly quitted his lodgings at Plymouth although yet too ill to travel with safety,

and gathering together all the money he could obtain, had set off, without one word of gratitude or farewell to those who had tended him during his illness. The clergyman supposed that he had returned to the place in which he had been living before his regiment was ordered to Plymouth; but it was evident that, in the prospect of recovery, he rather shunned than sought for a meeting with his wife, and both Mr. Butler and the Woods were thankful that she had been spared the additional pang this intelligence would have inflicted.

To provide a home for Edwyn became the next consideration. Farmer Wood and his wife would gladly have kept him with them, for their youngest boy had recently been apprenticed to his uncle, a saddler in the neighbouring town, and they loved the sound of childish voices in their house. Mr. Butler, however, on examining the letters which Mrs. Dunsford had brought with her from Holyhead, found that Edwyn had been brought up most carefully under the immediate superintendance of the clergyman; that he possessed a sweet voice and remarkable talent for music, and had for the last year been enrolled in the little band of choristers in his

parish church. Mr. Stanley expressed a hope that wherever the mother might settle her child would be able to continue in a vocation for which he seemed in every way peculiarly fitted.

The timid gentleness of his natural disposition had been elevated into something almost holy, by constant intercourse with his patient suffering mother, and daily witnessing her faith and loving resignation. At school he had been one of the least troublesome of the whole number, and since he had taken part as chorister in the daily service of the Church, his simple reverent behaviour and devout attention had sometimes drawn even older boys to follow his example. Mr. Butler, therefore, before deciding upon any plan for Edwyn's future, wrote to the clergyman whose letters Mrs. Dunsford had given him, and the result of his enquiry was most satisfactory, Mr. Stanley professing himself both willing and anxious to take charge of Edwyn, should Mr. Butler find it in any way inconvenient to keep him at Combe St. Mary's.

To this proposal Mr. Butler felt by no means inclined to agree. He had a band of well-trained choristers in his own church, and appropriated a part of the school-house to their instruction.

Some of the number, as many as he could induce their parents to bring up entirely for the service of the sanctuary, were inmates of his own dwelling, under the superintendance and direction of an intelligent well-principled young man belonging to the elder choir, and with these boys Mr. Butler determined to educate Edwyn, Mr. and Mrs. Wood promising to supply him with clothes, and desiring him to make their house his home, whenever the other choristers were allowed to visit their relations and friends.

Edwyn Dunsford's gentleness and obedience had so endeared him to the hearts of the good farmer and his wife, that they could not suffer him to leave them without bidding him again and again to look upon them as his parents, and to love them as much as he could instead of the mother he had lost.

"I do love you indeed," said the child earnestly, though very quietly, and my dear mother will love you in heaven for all your goodness to me—but if my father sends for me I may go to him, may I not? my mother bade me obey him in every thing."

"Surely, surely, dear child," said Mrs. Wood, giving him one more parting kiss, "and always

remember your dear mother, and do her bidding in all things; she was a true Christian mother to you while she lived, and if ever the souls of the blessed are permitted to watch over those they loved on earth, her spirit will be near you still I am sure."

"And if not," answered the child solemnly, "God and His good Angels are always near, and the blessed Jesus, Who suffered little children to come unto Him on earth, beholds us and cares for us still in heaven."

The fair child bent his head reverently at the Blessed Name, and the baptismal cross on his forehead glowed with a light unseen by mortal eyes, while the holy Angel that guarded his infant steps stretched his bright protecting wings on either side, as if to shelter him from sorrow and temptation.

When Edwyn arrived at the rectory he found his future companions in their school-room, busily engaged in practising for the morrow, which, being the feast of St. Andrew, was to be honoured with a full choral service. They were singing their separate parts, and Edwyn could not therefore join them, but, when Mr. Butler looked in for a moment on his way to church,

he gave Edwyn a kindly welcome, and, as he had already heard him joining in the simple chants used in the ordinary service, told him to take his seat with the rest. The master gave Edwyn into the especial care of a boy about two years older than himself, whose healthy open countenance and merry smile won the child's confidence at once.

As they walked together in silence up the church, Edwyn repeated secretly the words he had been long taught to utter, when in that holy place, "This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." On entering the vestry he kneeled down and prayed that he might assist reverently in the service of the Church, and be at length made worthy to join the choirs of heaven. But when, as he put on his snow-white surplice, he thought of all those who in white robes shall stand before the Lamb, earnestly entreating that he too might be kept pure from stain of sin, and have grace to attain to everlasting happiness, the remembrance of his dear mother and of the earnestness with which she had enjoined him thus to pray, rose so vividly in his mind that his heart swelled almost to bursting. At that

moment, however, Mr. Butler and his curate appeared, and as soon as Edwyn kneeled down in his place in the choir, something seemed to whisper to him that his praises, if faithfully offered, would still blend with hers, and he rose from his knees comforted, and prepared to take part devoutly in the service of the sanctuary.

The chants used were the beautiful Gregorians, so sublime in their simplicity; they were the same to which Edwyn had been accustomed at home, and his sweet clear voice was distinctly heard, although mingling in perfect harmony with those of his fellow choristers. Soon too every mournful remembrance vanished from his heart;—he scarcely knew that he was not again in the church where he had first knelt beside his mother, too young to understand anything except that one mysterious Presence filled all that holy house, and that he must be reverent and quiet in look and thought. As the words, which he remembered as long as he could remember anything, passed from his lips, wedded to the same sweet solemn sounds that had charmed his infant ear, a feeling of intense happiness came over him, and he did indeed sing praises with his heart as well as lips. Such are the

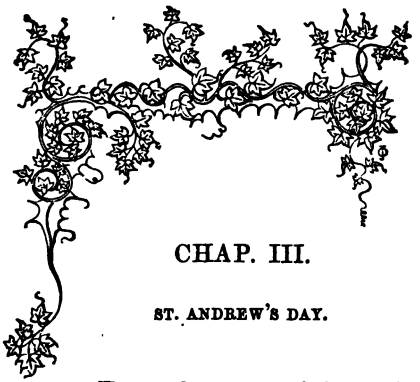
blessed influences of catholic worship, even on the hearts of children.

When the prayers were over Edwyn waked as from a dream and looked round, almost wondering to find himself surrounded by faces to which he was not accustomed, but his little friend Frank Merton hurried him away, telling him, that as soon as their early tea was over they should all return to the church to practise in full choir for the next day, "and after that," said he, "Mr. Butler will choose a few of the boys to help him in decorating the church, as all must be ready over-night, in time for the early prayers next morning;—I was sent home last time," he said, "for I was fool enough to stay gathering blackberries until after the bell went for service one afternoon, but I hope Mr. Butler will give me leave to stay now, and you too, that you may understand something about it before next time."

"Oh, I know," exclaimed Edwyn eagerly, "dear mother and I made ever so many wreaths last Whitsuntide;—we had them twined round every pillar in the church, and a cross, or a crown, or some other device, hanging from each; there were white wreaths only in the chancel, and on the

altar vases of lilies." The two boys were forgetting everything else in the excitement of this new topic, but a look from their master, George Burton, made Frank hurry on, and Edwyn quickly followed.

The simple meal was soon over, and the time usually allotted to recreation was that evening employed in practising in the church, for Mr. Butler thought the boys would enjoy their holiday doubly on the morrow, and think more solemnly of those whom festivals are appointed to commemorate, if the vigil had been hallowed by self-denial and fasting. Edwyn worked hard in decorating the church, and when all was completed, and they went home to bed, he was so tired with the exertion and excitement of the day, that he fell asleep as soon as he laid his head upon the pillow.



CHAP. III.

ST. ANDREW'S DAY.

"The crowds are met, and all around
Trembles with joy the holy ground,
And from the chancel rail
To where the cloistral arches rise,
Unnumber'd faces meet our eyes
With recent vigil pale."

THE church at Combe St. Mary's had been built in former times, when men thought more of beauty and less of luxury and exclusiveness than has unhappily been the custom in later days.

It had been originally an abbey church of Norman foundation, and dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, in gratitude for a signal victory which gave the place, once a stronghold of the Saxons, into their hands. The village continued for many generations to increase in riches and prosperity,

under the kindly influence and protection of the church, until both vanished with the destruction of the monastic establishment, on which the inhabitants depended for their very subsistence.

The church, originally a splendid Norman structure, had been enriched and beautified, century after century, by many successive abbots, and was considerably larger than was requisite for the now diminished congregation. Massively built, as were most of those old fabrics, it had for many years before Mr. Butler possessed the living been falling into a disgraceful state of dilapidation and decay; but enough still remained to attract the notice and excite the admiration of all who love the beautiful in architecture, or reverence the sublime spirit which speaks from every arch and sculptured stone in a true Christian church.

Mr. Butler held it to be his duty to see that the Church ritual, in his church at least, was faithfully observed, and enriched with every sign of reverence and devotion that eye, or ear, or loving heart could desire, for the worship of a God supreme in majesty as in love. His own home was simple, as befitted one who followed the steps of Him Who had not where to lay His

head, and the greater part of the income he derived from his living was devoted to the maintenance of schools, the beautifying of his church, and rendering the services more glorious and attractive. His parishioners, although generally too poor to give much gold or silver for the service of the sanctuary, responded joyfully, as far as their circumstances would allow, to the efforts of their clergyman, and imitating his zeal and self-denial, were always ready to give time and labour for the decent ordering of every thing belonging either to the church or schools. Nearly all of them testified their deep appreciation of the privileges provided for them by the Church, and of which Mr. Butler was careful that they should never be defrauded, by constant and regular attendance at the daily services, and a strict and joyful observance both of festivals and fasts.

On the morning of St. Andrew's day the boys were roused before daybreak that they might be duly ready for the lengthened service, which began early, in order that it might be over before the usual time for commencing the daily toil; and thus all the villagers were enabled to attend. There were indeed few amongst

them who would not have been grieved to lose the opportunity of joining as usual in the Church's prayers, and many celebrated each festival day by participation in the holy Eucharist, thus realizing to the utmost that belief in the Communion of Saints which our Creeds and Prayer-books teach.

It was a cold dull November morning; not actually raining, but so dark from a heavy fog that even Edwyn and his companions could not make their simple toilet without candles, and some of them no doubt shrank rather unwillingly from the idea of leaving their warm beds to hurry into the cold morning air. But their master's cheerful voice and example shamed even the laziest into courage, and Edwyn was so anxious to see again the church which he had assisted to decorate on the preceding evening, that he was up and dressed almost before the other children were fully awake.

Cold indeed must have been the heart of any who could view without a thrill of reverential love the solemn and beautiful scene that greeted every devout worshipper, as, with head bowed in humble adoration, he entered the church. There was no chill within those walls, although they had been exposed outwardly to the damps of

ages;—no darkness within the oaken portals, though the fogs of a November dawn lay heavy on the atmosphere without. The church had not indeed been empty many hours during the night, for Mr. Butler and his curate loved not to quit the altar on the vigil of a festival, till they had chanted their hymn for the midnight hour, and any who passed that way when "the stars were lit in heaven," might have seen a solitary light, and heard a low anthem borne upon the midnight air, bearing to all weary wanderers the gentle invitation

> "Mark the hour, and turn this way.
> Sons of Israel far and near,
> Wearied with the world's dim day
> Turn to Him Whose eyes are here!"

The church, with its lofty nave and aisles, was so much larger than was necessary for the accommodation of the villagers, that the nave only was used for divine service, the aisles being left vacant, neither crowded with sittings, nor defaced by those rude staring monuments which too often offend the eye in a country church. In the chancel were some recumbent effigies of knights and crusaders, carefully preserved, and interesting

from their antiquity, and a few brasses, but these were scarcely noticed on that St. Andrew's morning, and even the magnificent stained glass in the windows could add but little to the general effect, for lack of sunshine to give life and radiance to its pictured lessons.

Yet was there beauty, solemn beauty, within the church, and even the absence of sunshine caused neither gloom nor chill. From the high-pitched roof of oak depended a coronal of unusual size, and its thickly clustered lights shed forth a flood of radiance, amply sufficient to illumine the whole of the nave. All were kindled on that dim morning, and their light was reflected back, not alone from the moveable sittings of dark polished oak, the shining pavement, sculptured arches and finely moulded shafts and capitals, but from bright banners, embroidered with silk of the most brilliant hues, and heavy with gold and silver thread, which floated from each lofty pillar all up the nave. Amongst the various devices Edwyn recognised some that were familiar to him, and others bearing especial reference to the saint whom they were that day to commemorate. The cross so well known as the cross of St. Andrew, because the holy

apostle suffered martyrdom on a cross of that peculiar form, sparkled in silver upon a banner of deep blue; on another was the sacred Monogram of our Lord, on another the fish, which at the same time typified our Saviour, and contained an allusion to the apostle, who at His bidding became a "fisher of men." There too was the holy Lamb, and, mingling thoughts of our Saviour's suffering with the memory of His faithful servant, the Cross of Calvary, the Crown of Thorns and other instruments of the Passion; while others bore displayed the pot of fragrant lilies, meet emblem of her to whom the church was dedicated, or a snow-white dove, symbolic of that Holy Spirit by Whose inspiration apostles preached, and saints and martyrs received strength to believe, to suffer, and to die.

Up the bright avenue passed white-robed priests and choir, into their respective places. The chancel-arch was wreathed with evergreens and a few of the latest autumn flowers, roses, and chrysanthemums, shining out through the dark-green foliage like stars of crimson or of gold. The altar was decked with all due care and propriety; the frontal being of rich crimson velvet, the colour of martyrdom,

gorgeously embroidered with coloured silks and the purest gold and silver. On the super-frontal were worked, in colours bright and pure as those of nature, seven cross-like flowers; the exquisite blossoms of the *Clarkia Pulchella*, fair in itself, but fairer still to Christian eyes, by reason of the memories it evokes. The white linen cloth covering the altar was bordered with delicate embroidery and a narrow fringe, leaving uncovered the magnificent antependium. The altar itself was of stone, and raised high above the level of the nave; on the super-altar stood candlesticks of massy gold, adorned, like the holy vessels, with precious stones, which reflected in many coloured rays the light of the waxen tapers, kindling bright memories of Him Who is indeed the light of this dark world, and Who, from that blessed altar gives not light only, but the living bread, to be the life of men. There were richly illuminated service-books too, and a credence-table on which stood the as yet unconsecrated elements:—and at the back of the altar costly hangings of cloth of gold.

Glorious indeed was it to look up the long nave and chancel to that holiest place, all glittering with light. From the fretted carving

overhead, and the delicate tracery of roof and window, to the bright colouring of painted walls and roof, and the emblems on the encaustic tiles which formed the pavement of the sanctuary, all bore stamped upon them, in characters never to be misunderstood, the expression of fervent ungrudging love and devotion, willing to spend and to be spent in the service of Him, Who is pleased to accept as freewill offerings at our hands the good things He hath given us. But best and most beautiful of all, above the altar was a golden cross, and on either side of it stood vases of costly flowers, the rarest that could at that season be procured, for amongst the few rich members of the congregation of the church of St. Mary the Virgin, were some whose hothouses and gardens were tended chiefly for the service of the church; who bade their gardeners enquire for every costly rarity, and exert their utmost art and skill in forcing choice plants to perfection in time for the festivals of early spring, or keeping back the richest and most fragrant flowers to exhale their sweetness in the church in the dark chill days of autumn and winter. Pity is it that so few are found to expend time and money on the cultivation of

flowers for the service of the Church alone. Surely flowers can nowhere look more lovely, nowhere be employed for a holier object; and though some alas, look with unkind and doubtful eye on much that makes our worship here assimilate more closely with that of heaven, our offerings of flowers at least cannot deserve their reprobation. Beautiful, pure, and fragrant, they bear to all hearts lessons of humility, contentedness, and love; and if we do but look beyond the mere outward blossom, their life and swift decay, their winter sleep, and the bursting forth of seeds and buds in early spring time, may warn mankind that life is ever tending to the grave, and that the grave is the gate of immortality.

Edwyn bent his head in reverence as he gazed on the solemn scene before him, for although he read not aright all the solemn meaning that spoke from pillar and scroll, and mystic ornament, he felt that every thing there was holy, fair, and true, and offered his humble prayer with deeper reverence to the God Who was thus adored.

Then rose the solemn chant of the introductory sentences. The low intoning of the confession, echoed from the lips of nearly every penitent sinner in that simple congregation; the clear

full tone of the priestly absolution; the loud "Amen," which sealed its power to many a lowly heart; and again, the swell of voices in that blessed prayer, which invites every baptized Christian to acknowledge their "Father" "in heaven." Happy indeed were it for us and for our Church, if we could oftener join in services, such, as on that day were performed in the church at Combe St. Mary's. Most blessed is it, and full of comfort to the pious soul, to listen to the choral anthem, clothing the aspirations of so many hearts in tones of gratitude and adoring love; to hear the low solemn murmur of the chanted litany; the humble supplication of the Kyrie eleison; the clear sound of the gospel trump proclaimed by the priest from the altar. Yet far surpassing even these in holiness and sweetness, was the thrilling solemnity of the choral communion that day celebrated: the chanted sentences of the offertory; the seraphic sweetness of the blessed invitation, "Come unto Me all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." Oh! beauty too sublime for words! too sacred to be further pictured! With one last glorious hymn of praise the holy office ended, and the grateful congregation

were dismissed with words of blessing and of peace, all feeling with humility and gratitude that in the harmonious order of the Church services, they had been permitted to approach nearer than before, to the worship of angels and saints in heaven.

Edwyn and the rest of the choristers returned home, and were presently dismissed, as was often the custom on saints' days, to dine and spend the day, till evening service, with their friends. Edwyn spent his holiday at farmer Wood's; and his good friends were delighted to hear his animated account of all he was to do and learn at Mr. Butler's, and his delighted anticipations of future happiness as a chorister in the church of St. Mary the Virgin.

CHAP. IV.

THE CHORISTER'S DAILY LIFE.

"In teaching a people to sing with the voice 'the songs of Zion,' we cannot but believe that, God helping, much is done towards teaching them to sing with the understanding and with the heart. A faculty is developed which God designed for His glory; and if so designed it cannot be idle without injury, nor be rightly exercised without advantage."

Sermon by the Rev. Henry Melville.

TIME, as it passed on, seemed but to realize the happy promise of that first day. Edwyn learned by degrees to think less anxiously about his father than he had done at first, and would perhaps have regretted any circumstance that called him from Combe St. Mary, or occasioned a change in his present position. Week after week passed on so quietly, in a regular succession of business and recreation, school-work and church-work, that time slipped away almost un-

heeded by our happy little chorister boys. Every morning at six o'clock, winter or summer, they were awakened from their slumbers, and reminded, as they lifted their heads from the pillow, to return thanks to Him Who had protected them through the long hours of darkness. They met for prayers in the school-room at half-past six, and returned home to breakfast at eight, after the early morning service. At nine o'clock the bell rang for school, and at twelve the boys were all dismissed, the time from mid-day till three o'clock being allotted to dinner and recreation. The hours of afternoon study were devoted chiefly to music—not to the practice of singing alone, but to instructions in the principles of thorough-bass and composition, one or two boys of very decided musical talent receiving lessons on the organ.

A considerable portion of each day was given to religious instruction. Mr. Butler was especially careful to maintain amongst his chorister boys, no less than in the elder choir, a high tone of reverence and religious feeling, and strove earnestly to give them a deep sense of the great blessing and privilege of a vocation, which made them servants in the house of God. None

of the boys seemed to feel this privilege more than Edwyn: the trials of his childhood, while they calmed down the wild exuberance of boyish spirits, had fostered the natural thoughtfulness of his disposition. Since his mother's death too, he had seemed to feel that in the services of the Church the bond between his soul and hers was drawn into closer and more sacred union; and if betrayed for a moment into anything like irreverence of look or gesture, his fault was afterwards deplored with tears of sorrow and repentance.

Frank Merton and he were still firm friends: although Frank was as careless and light-hearted as Edwyn was calm and thoughtful, he yet loved Edwyn dearly, and liked to engage him in all his little schemes of amusement. Sometimes indeed the latter was induced by Frank's example to follow up some plan of idle pleasure, until it interfered even with serious duties; but it more frequently happened that Edwyn's thoughtfulness restrained his volatile companion. When Mr. Butler talked to them of the happiness of being permitted to spend their lives in daily singing the praises of God, and of the superior holiness and purity which such duties

claimed, both boys would earnestly resolve to make duty henceforth their first consideration; and although these resolutions were too often broken, still they rarely erred without acknowledging their fault, and proving the reality of their sorrow by more earnest efforts to perform their duty aright.

Two evenings in the week were always set apart by Mr. Butler for general practice in the church, and he was then glad to receive any of the parishioners, whether of the higher or lower classes, who, wishing to join with propriety in the public service, were glad to have an opportunity of practising with the choir. These were very happy evenings; for those who came to practise were frequently brothers, sisters, or other relations of the young choristers, and in the summer evenings Mr. Butler often invited them to the rectory—the boys to have a game in the play-ground before supper, the girls to the more quiet amusement of examining his fine collection of sacred prints, or learning some of the less difficult branches of church needlework.

This happy round of occupations was seldom interrupted, except by the duly recurring festivals

and fasts, both of which were strictly observed, as far at least as Mr. Butler could by advice, exhortation, and example, provide for their observance. He held obedience to be one of the first duties of a Christian, whether child or man, and he himself set an example of it, by unquestioning submission to all the Church's rules. Yet he did not ask of his people an unreasoning conformity. It was his wont, on the vigil of every feast, to gather round him all who cared to be instructed, and explain in simple words the subject and reason of the commemoration: nor were those other days passed over in silence, which, though memorials of fellow Christians of an earlier time, are too often wholly overlooked and forgotten. On the vigil of St. Agnes, he related to them the history of that pure-minded Roman maiden, who, while almost a child, suffered martyrdom rather than renounce her Christian faith, and shewed them in painting, or perhaps on the stained glass of one of the church windows, her sweet youthful figure, with the lamb in her arms, signifying both her name (Agnus) and her virtues. The heroic self-sacrifice of St. Alban, the glorious proto-martyr of Britain, whose name amongst the so-called *black-letter days* of our calendar

seems to reproach us that we hold his memory in so little esteem; and St. Edmund, sacrificed to the bloody cruelty of the Danes. Nor did he forget the martyred Charles, holiest and most blessed, in that his sufferings were indeed a reflection, faint though it be and feeble, of the agony of Him, the King of Saints, Who was dragged by His own people to a death of agony and shame, His last moments embittered by the curses, and insults, and foul spittings of those whom He died to redeem, and for whose forgiveness He prayed in His last moments, as did our own royal martyr for his guilty people.

On these occasions Mr. Butler excited their interest still further by naming the various symbols by which these and other saints may usually be recognised, and he was often able to refer them for an illustration to figures on the church porch, the chancel-arch, or some of the beautiful stained glass windows of the church. The characteristics of the apostles are generally familiar to all; and Mr. Butler also pointed out the bleeding form of St. Sebastian, bound to a tree and transfixed with arrows, with the somewhat similar figure of St. Edmund, the latter however distinguished by the crown, which indi-

cated his royal dignity: St. Lawrence the deacon, firm in the midst of agony, and bearing in one hand a palm-branch, in the other the cruel instrument of his torturing death: St. Mary Magdalene, known by the luxuriant tresses of her long fair hair, and the alabaster box of ointment in her hand, introduced in early times by those who identified her, it has generally been thought correctly, with the "woman who was a sinner." But the time would fail me, were I even to attempt an enumeration of all those glorious saints, with whom

> "Sitting in turns beneath His sacred feet,
> We hold communion sweet."

What has been already said may suffice to convey some idea, however imperfect, of Edwyn's happiness, and of the sweet peace that springs from a constant loving obedience to the Church's ordinances. Would that such obedience were more frequent! that all those who are now wandering through the world in a vain search for amusement and excitement to stimulate their jaded faculties, or efface the memory of some "rooted sorrow," would turn to their Church for comfort, and occupy themselves, in obedience

to her rules, in constant prayers, and almsdeeds, and works of Christian love!

In such tranquil occupations Edwyn's childish years glided happily away. Mr. Butler wrote now and then to Holyhead, but no tidings of Edwyn's father reached either Mr. Stanley or himself. As the boy grew older, he learned the reason of his mother's having been disappointed of the remittance she expected, and seemed to understand better than he had done as a child the wrong and injury inflicted on that gentle mother; but, while he held her memory in even more tender reverence than before, the affection with which she had striven to inspire him for his unknown father became holier and more earnest, and he prayed earnestly and constantly that, if yet alive, he might some day be permitted to embrace him, and give him his mother's last sad message of love and forgiveness.

It was the hour of morning prayer on a bright day in summer, the third since that cold wintry evening which first brought Edwyn Dunsford to Combe St. Mary's. Soft and sweet was the choral anthem that floated on the fresh and balmy air, and low and solemn the responses of the chanted litany that swelled from the lips of

the kneeling congregation. Just at that moment, while all hearts were wrapped in secret prayer, there stood within the shade of the church porch the figure of a little child, pale, wan, and weary, with a strange wandering expression in his dark blue eyes, as, attracted by the sound of music, he ventured further and further into the church. Some undefined sensation of awe evidently restrained his childish steps, and yet he seemed scarcely to understand the reason of his emotion, or to know wherefore the crowd of kneeling worshippers were there assembled. While he yet lingered irresolute, as if doubting whether to advance or retreat, the prayers came to an end, the sound of voices ceased, and the organ, in its turn, took up the strain of thanksgiving and praise. At that burst of glorious music the little child looked round him with a smile, sweet yet most expressionless, and presently the smile broke into a vacant laugh. A man, who appeared to have been looking for him, entered quickly at the sound, and putting his hand on the child's shoulder, drew him gently but firmly out of the church; they entered a field close by, and were presently out of sight.

Mr. Butler, who had noticed the circumstance, enquired if either of them were known at all in the village, and being answered in the negative, he concluded that they were merely travellers passing through the place, and had been attracted, as were many others, by the sound of music in the church. Still there was something in the child's sweet wondering look that excited both his interest and compassion; and Mr. Butler was glad when on the following morning he recognised the same child sitting with the man who seemed to be his father, on the stone bench within the entrance of the church porch. He spoke to them kindly as he passed, inviting them to enter, and find a seat within the sacred edifice, where they might more fitly join in the offering of prayer and praise. The man listened with a look half sullen, half indifferent, but he advanced to occupy the seat pointed out by Mr. Butler; while the latter, with his little band of choristers, took his place in the church.

The music selected for the services of that day happened to be of a character peculiarly solemn and touching, yet simple as could well be. The voices of choir and congregation mingled in tones of breathless harmony; every

syllable was distinctly heard, nor could even an unpractised ear fail to understand each word both of psalms and responses.

Mr. Butler remarked that the child's face still wore the same gentle yet wandering expression which he had remarked on the previous day, and that he evinced the same rapturous delight at the sound of the music, although his outward demonstrations of pleasure were apparently restrained by his father's presence. Gradually that restless expression melted into one of subdued and tranquil awe, as if the holy music had hushed and calmed his wandering soul and senses; and as he thus required less of the watchful attention of his father, a more solemn feeling took possession of his soul also, and it was evident that the words of confession and prayer fell not unheeded on his ear. The first and second collect for morning prayer had been said, the congregation rose from their knees; an anthem taken from the twenty-second Psalm was given out, and mournful and solemn was the strain that followed: "My God, my God, look upon me, why hast Thou forsaken me, and art so far from my health, and from the words of my complaint?" The music with its deep

the panelling of the [illegible]
pointed out, as illustr[illegible]
cross, a figure of [illegible]
engaged in deadly [illegible]
the arch-type of evil [illegible]
who, as we are told, [illegible]
serpent or dragon-like [illegible]
him with the cross [illegible]
meekness and in stre[illegible]
struggled vainly [illegible]
him bound and exp[illegible]
presentation of St. J[illegible]
the enraged Jews [illegible]
serene demeanour [illegible]
wrought upon the [illegible]
that kneeling at [illegible]
to be allowed to [illegible]
death. St. Cecilia [illegible]
pierced with three [illegible]
ing near, bearing [illegible]
spotless innocence [illegible]

As the theme [illegible]
the church's [illegible]
Christ's followers [illegible]

* The cross [illegible]
Or of some [illegible]

his face with his hands
breathless silence
the divine Psalm
of humble faith
And Thou continuest
Israel."
fluence that holy words
fully blended, may exert
llowed by that hymn,
grateful adoration the
at last knelt one who
ntered the precincts
rely prayed and often
sickness and sorrow,
evil ways; who had
almost a beggar, yet
prayer. There, in that
mer morning, the voice
other he had deserted
fidence in the heart of
and beside him, his eye
wandering light, as if
touched some chord that
a mind on which the
shone, sat the neg-
ring of the woman, for

mournful tones, seemed like the very cry of a despairing heart, of a wounded penitent who felt himself indeed an outcast from his God: then a young voice of thrilling sweetness, it was Edwyn's, took up the strain, and was answered by another scarcely less heavenly in tone: "Oh, my God, I cry in the daytime but Thou hearest not, and in the night-season also I take no rest!" Once and again swelled forth that heavenly song and died away in silence as the words "I take no rest" were repeated. It was as if the heart, sinking under its heavy burden of guilt and sorrow, worn out by long hours of watching and despair, of agony and penitence, were at length lulled by those sweet sounds to peace, and had found a rest that nothing earthly might disturb. The stranger's head sank low upon his hands, the child sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the cross above the altar, his ear chained in rapt attention to the anthem. Lower still the stranger bowed his head, and albeit he looked like one unused to kneel either in church or closet, the power of those thrilling voices, the holy mournfulness of that solemn Psalm, touched even his rude heart; an impulse that he could not withstand brought him

to his knees, and covering his face with his hands he wept aloud. There was breathless silence in the church, and then the divine Psalm swelled forth again, in notes of humble faith and childlike confidence: "And Thou continuest holy, Oh Thou worship of Israel."

Who shall limit the influence that holy words and solemn music, thus fitly blended, may exert upon the sinner's heart? Bowed by that hymn, which filled with tones of grateful adoration the whole house of God, there at last knelt one who had not for many years entered the precincts of a church, who had rarely prayed and often sinned; who had known sickness and sorrow, yet turned not from his evil ways; who had been a wanderer and almost a beggar, yet never bent his knees in prayer. There, in that church, on that fair summer morning, the voice of the child whose mother he had deserted kindled thoughts of penitence in the heart of the unhappy father, and beside him, his eye gleaming with a bright wandering light, as if the holy music had touched some chord that awakened echoes even in a mind on which the light of reason had never shone, sat the neglected and sickly offspring of the woman, for

whom his wife had been abandoned, and who, by some sublime impulse that no philosopher or moralist could define, had followed the hallowed sounds of prayer and praise, and thus guided his father once more into the house of God.

CHAP. V.

THE RETURNING PENITENT.

"Not so returns the freshness of the Spring
And the Baptismal innocence of life,
Not so the spirit folds her wounded wing
In stillness, for the darkness and the strife
Of sinful days, leave traces which invade
The texture of the soul, and long its beauty fade."

Mr. BUTLER could not fail to observe the deep emotion of the stranger, and he felt anxious to see more of him, although little supposing him to be the father of Edwyn. But the moment the music ceased, the spell that had bound father and child seemed broken, and rising from his knees and glancing hastily round, the man led his child from the church without a moment's delay. Some of the villagers

placed themselves purposely in his way, hoping that he might address them, but he strode onwards apparently absorbed in his own thoughts, and there was nothing in his countenance, which had resumed its ordinary forbidding look, to encourage even kindness, much less curiosity. He was at church again on the two succeeding mornings; the day after was Sunday, and as Mr. Butler stood at the entrance of the schoolhouse, he caught sight of the same fair child with his blue wandering eyes, creeping stealthily along under the garden wall, and listening to the voices of the children who were singing within. His hands and pinafore were full of flowers, and on observing him more closely, Mr. Butler was surprised to see that those he held in his hand were twined into the rude resemblance of a cross. As soon as the child perceived Mr. Butler he stood still, looking at him with his usual vacant gaze; in a moment, however, the expression changed into a look of brightening intelligence, and seizing him by the hand without hesitation or timidity, he pointed with his flowery cross in the direction of the church, and seemed only eager to lead Mr. Butler thither. He was perfectly regard-

less of all his questioning, and an eager "Come, come," was all that could be elicited from him in reply.

On a sudden a new thought seemed to strike him, and leaning his little cross of flowers against the side of the porch, he bent his head reverently, as he had seen Mr. Butler do during the service, and in a sweet voice, most musically toned, began rapidly to repeat something which a few words audible here and there proved to be intended for the Creed. When he had finished, he started suddenly round with a wild cry of pleasure, and again seized Mr. Butler's hand, as if he felt *sure* that his meaning must now be understood, and as the church bells were just beginning their morning chime, Mr. Butler accompanied him without reluctance.

Just outside the school-house they met the father, who, seeing how his little boy was accompanied, turned away, but Mr. Butler following him, made some kindly enquiry about the child, and was answered civilly, though with an appearance of constraint.

"Do you think of settling in my parish," asked Mr. Butler, "or making any long stay? You must be a stranger at present I am sure,

for I am tolerably familiar with every face that belongs to Combe St. Mary."

"Why Sir," answered the man, "I am but a traveller in these parts, having got a lift so far from Plymouth, by taking charge of a waggon till I met the regular driver, and since I came I have been working a little for a farmer in the next village, hoping to get a trifle to carry me on my way; but my little fellow here caught the sound of your church music the other day, and I was fain to bring him here again, for 'tis not much pleasure he has had in life as yet, poor babe!"

"You are on your way to church then now?" asked Mr. Butler.

"Well, Sir, I did think of taking the child to hear the music."

"And for yourself?" asked Mr. Butler kindly but seriously.

"Oh, we soldiers don't know much about churches," he replied bluntly, as if not wishing to enter upon the subject.

"You are in the army then?" said Mr. Butler, a sudden thought striking him.

"Yes, Sir," he answered rather sullenly.

"Well," said Mr. Butler, not wishing either

to offend or alarm him, "and I too am a soldier, though I dare say there is some difference between the manners and customs of the army you speak of and mine. Still I cannot help regarding you in some sort as a comrade, for I doubt not you have been christened?"

"Yes," said the man, wondering what this was to lead to.

"And signed with your Lord's sign, and pledged to follow His banner, and to be His faithful soldier and servant unto the end? Come, fellow-soldier," continued Mr. Butler, as he gave the child into his father's care, "Let me have the pleasure of seeing you obey your great Captain's commands, and join us in His holy house: and if you are seeking work, or want any help that I can give you, wait for me to-morrow at the church, or call at the rectory. I am always *here* twice in the day." The man thanked him with some appearance of cordiality, and Mr. Butler laying his hand on the child's head, with a brief word of blessing, quitted them and entered the church.

On the following morning, the soldier was at church again, but alone; and as he stood lingering near the gate, after he left the church

Mr. Butler went up to him and enquired kindly for the child. "I am afraid, Sir," said the soldier, "that he is not over well. He was always a sickly little fellow, and not so clear in his head as might be, though he is as gentle and harmless as a lamb, and easy enough to manage, unless he get within hearing of music, or a church, and then he is not to be put back easily. This morning he seemed so faint and weak that I could not bring him with me, and then I understood by his words and signs that he wanted me to bring the music home for him; so I thought, after what you said yesterday, I would make bold to speak to you, and ask if you would tell me where I might find a doctor to take the child to."

"You shall take me to see him first," said Mr. Butler, always ready for every good work; so they went together to a miserable half-ruined cottage, belonging to the farmer for whom the soldier had been at work, and which he allowed him to occupy for the time.

The poor little fellow was lying on a sack of chaff and straw, scantily covered, and apparently weak and faint for want of nourishment. There was a little fire burning, or rather smoking, in the damp chimney, and a few slices of bread and

bacon on the shelf, which formed their only table; but the child had not, his father said, tasted any food since yesterday, having refused everything except a little water. "He wants tea, Sir, or some woman's messes," said the father, "and how I am to give them to him, God knows;" and he threw himself on the rude bench in a sort of despair.

"Have you no wife, then?" asked Mr. Butler; "where is the child's mother?"

A groan was the only answer. Mr. Butler was more and more confirmed in his idea that this very man was Edwyn's father. He went to the child, who seemed weak and feverish; and thinking that warmth, and light nourishing food were what he most needed, desired the father to go with him to the rectory, and promised that either his housekeeper, or the doctor, if necessary, should return with him to the cottage.

As they were on their way back, Mr. Butler asked his name.

"Dunsford," answered the man, taken a little by surprise.

"You come from Plymouth then?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the man, wondering still more.

"And are going where?—to Holyhead?" he continued, as the man hesitated for a moment.

"Do you know me, Sir?" said Dunsford, stopping short in his astonishment.

"I knew your poor wife," said Mr. Butler, severely; "I know your child."

"My wife! my child!" exclaimed the man, in a burst of uncontrollable emotion; "Do you, indeed? But you say you *knew* her," he added, as Mr. Butler's words returned to his mind. "She is gone then—she is dead—she died cursing me, I know it—I deserved it; miserable wretch that I am! oh tell me, tell me," he exclaimed, looking up piteously, while the tears flowed down his rugged cheeks, "Is she living yet? Can I, dare I hope to be forgiven?"

"Your poor wife," said Mr. Butler, "is gone to her rest, and you may thank God for it, that your base and unmanly desertion of her led her into no worse evil than suffering in this world. She loved you," said Mr. Butler, more kindly, as he marked the intense anguish of the soldier's countenance, "as women often do, more, far more than you deserved; she prayed for you to the last; to say that she forgave you is hardly needful, for in truth I believe she never had an un-

kind or angry feeling towards you. Her last words to her child were, to bid him pray for you and love you for her sake. We must not stay to speak of this now," said Mr. Butler: "the poor babe we have left behind is, you say, your child, and unless something is done for him soon, he may be too feeble to recover."

Again Dunsford groaned heavily; but he quickened his pace mechanically, and they walked on for some time in silence. Suddenly turning to Mr. Butler, he said in a low voice, husky with emotion, "You said, Sir, that you knew my poor injured wife; might I ask you to tell me what you knew about her, and," he faltered, "my child, my wife's child?"

Mr. Butler told him all he knew of her life and death; "but," he added, as they approached the rectory, "there is one here who knows more than I do of her patient suffering, if you are really sincere in your wish to see him. Your boy is one of our choristers, and has lived in my house ever since his mother's death." The strong man turned pale, and his knees trembled with emotion; he covered his face with his hands, and while large tears of shame and agony ran down his cheeks,

he murmured, "It was his voice then that I heard when I dreamed that angels were calling me to repentance, and that she herself had been sent from heaven to save me from despair; it was indeed her own sweet voice that spoke to me from the lips of her child—she forgave me—oh! can he forgive his mother's wrongs, and pity his unhappy father?" He looked up as he spoke, but Mr. Butler had disappeared, and he presently saw him returning from the house, accompanied by the housekeeper, and a little boy carrying a basket of necessary food and clothing. Mr. Butler directed them to the hut where Dunsford's child was lying, and then leading the father into his study, left him there while he went to prepare Edwyn for the interview.

It was with a strangely mingled feeling of fear and pity that Edwyn learned that the man whom he had observed in church was in truth his father. At first he hesitated, and seemed almost unwilling to see him, feeling that he did not love him as a parent, and fearing perhaps also that his return might interrupt the happy course of his present life. But when he was reminded that the hour for which his mother had so earnestly prayed was now at last arrived—told that

his father was in the house, longing to clasp him to his bosom, and to weep with him over that dead mother's grave, he took Mr. Butler's hand, and overcoming his reluctance by a powerful effort, begged to be taken at once to his father.

Mr. Butler led him to the study door; he opened it: Dunsford sat there, with his face buried in his hands, the very picture of remorse and grief. "Father!" said the sweet holy voice of Edwyn, as he entered: the guilty parent looked up: he met the clear blue eye of his child fixed on him with an angel's pitying love; he heard again the sweet tones that had almost won him to believe that the child's dead mother, in her deep yearning love, had spoken to his heart even from paradise, and extending his arms by an involuntary impulse, in a moment the child was clasped to his father's heart, and the innocent and the guilty mingled tears of joy and penitence, even as when angels rejoice in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

None save the father and child knew all that passed in that interview. Edwyn was too young, too pure in heart, to understand all his father's guilt—he knew chiefly that he had done evil and repented, and that the child whose strange sweet

looks had attracted him from the first, was, in truth, his brother. To Mr. Butler, Dunsford afterwards acknowledged that he had indeed left Plymouth to avoid meeting his wife; that returning to the place where his other children had been left, he found only the youngest, a poor little sickly creature, whose intellect had been weakened and almost destroyed by neglect and ill-treatment. The others had been removed by their mother, he knew not whither. His own shattered health soon made it almost impossible for him to continue to perform the duties of a soldier; and having with some difficulty procured his discharge, he had at last set out on his journey to Holyhead, taking with him his poor sickly infant, and faintly hoping that his wife might have returned thither on finding no remittances from him at the town she had named. Little had he known or appreciated the deep love, the strong faithful spirit, that animated his wife's fragile frame, and gave her courage to undertake on foot a journey from which many men would have shrunk at such a season; and the history of her patient suffering, her piety and love, touched him to the quick, kindling in him a deep sorrow and unfeigned repentance.

When he and Edwyn left the study, both were serene yet sad, and the faces of each bore traces of tears. Yet the countenance of the father was turned upon his child with intense, almost adoring affection, and the boy's hand rested in his father's with a trusting gentle love that was beautiful to behold.

The village doctor had accompanied the housekeeper on her visit to the cottage where little Harry lay, and both agreed with Mr. Butler in recommending warmth and nourishment as the best restoratives. As Dunsford still had one or two days' work on the farm, Mr. Butler procured accommodation for his child in the house of a poor widow living near the rectory, and Dunsford was to live there also, and try to get work in the village as soon as his present engagement was fulfilled.

Mr. Butler told Edwyn that he might return with his father, and help in removing his sick brother to the widow's cottage. During the child's illness, which was but trifling, and soon yielded to kind nursing and good food, Edwyn tended him constantly, and as soon as he could walk took him to see farmer Wood and his kind wife. Dunsford also was persuaded, although reluctantly, to ac-

company them, and he was deeply moved at this first meeting with those whose Christian charity and kindness had done so much to soothe the last moments of his suffering wife, and who had, indeed, as far as lay in their power, acted the part of parents to his child. He was never weary of hearing, nor Mrs. Wood of recounting, every circumstance connected with his wife's last moments; and his own repentance and resolutions of amendment seemed so sincere, that when farmer Wood asked Mr. Butler's advice about proposing to Dunsford to assist him in the management of his farm, Mr. Butler gave the plan his cordial approbation, and promised to do everything in his power to assist both the father and little Harry. He was especially anxious to keep the man under his own eye for a time, and to confirm, if possible, the good impulses which seemed now, by God's blessing, to have been awakened in his heart. Edwyn was to continue in the school, with a prospect of being received into the elder choir when old enough, and perhaps employed also in instructing the younger choristers. His talent for music was remarkable, and had been carefully cultivated, his master constantly endeavouring to impress upon him

the important truth, that this, like all other talents, was a gift of God, and to be devoted to His glory. Edwyn's school duties were now occasionally interrupted by those which he owed to his father and Harry; and as the happiness of his present life softened by degrees the sad impression that early sorrow had left upon his mind, he took part with greater zest in the boyish sports of the playground and the gay humour of his companions. His duties in the church, however, still claimed precedence over all other pleasures; and although he was less quiet out of school hours, it seldom happened that the master had occasion to reprove him for idleness or inattention during those allotted to study.

CHAP. VI.

THE CONFIRMATION.

"Draw, Holy Ghost, Thy seven-fold veil
Between us and the fires of youth;
Breathe, Holy Ghost, Thy freshening gale,
Our fever'd brow in age to soothe!"

THERE seemed deep reason to hope that the better feelings which had at length been awakened in Dunsford's heart would not prove so transitory as on the former occasion. The good seed that had been sown during his previous illness, his subsequent sorrow and suffering, the account of his poor wife's patient love, and still more his own love for Edwyn, and constantly witnessing the simple piety that governed his child's conduct; all combined to shew him the utter falseness and hollowness of his former wishes and desires; to kindle in his soul aspirations for better things, and a wish to devote him-

self to some object holier and higher than the mere pursuit of earthly comfort and happiness.

These were however but secondary causes. Though perhaps the first whose influence he recognised, they could not have been in themselves sufficient to work any heart-ennobling change. Other and deeper ministrations were needed, and these, happily for his soul's health, he had not far to seek.

Often in his after years did he bless the day when the sweet solemn sound of the chanted anthem caught his ear, and his innocent child's unconscious steps led him within the precincts of the church at Combe St. Mary's. The solemn aspect of those venerable walls, the lofty arches, and upsoaring pillars, rising upwards, upwards still, till as they lost themselves in the interwoven tracery of the groined roof, the eye, seeking to unravel their mazes, seemed wandering in infinity. The fitful light streaming down from many-tinted windows, on tesselated pavement, sculptured niche, and marble altar-step; the brightness of that holy spot, to which every eye turned in devotion and admiration up the long vista of nave and chancel, and pillared aisle, resting at length upon the cross, that holy

symbol by which the dead have been raised to life, and the evil one subdued, and which in every heart, however ignorant and hardened, awakens some thought of Him, Who out of His great love to sinners died thereon, some remembrance, faint though it may be and transient, or alas, wilfully crushed and set aside, of our sinfulness and His agony. It was looking on that cross, which first brought back to Dunsford's mind the simple lessons, so long forgotten, of his childish years, till one by one, as mingling in deep solemn music, the voices of choir and congregation swelled upwards to the heaven, or died away like music in a dream, the holier memories of his youth returned to him, who had wandered so far from his father's home.

The sight of that cross brought back to his mind what he had once heard of the holy sign traced upon his brow in infancy; he remembered too the vows, which by the power of that cross he had once held himself pledged to keep; ere yet he had sinned too determinately against his baptismal grace. It was wonderful how everything in his earliest life seemed to rise up before him. The good teaching of his school and pastors; the idleness and wilfulness of his boy-

hood, all leading on to the deep guilt, the utter forgetfulness of God, which had stained his riper years. Then it was that as he turned his eyes upon the cross, and heard the solemn Creed repeated by the united voices of priests and people in the lofty accents of faith and undoubting trust, he seemed in a moment to realize all the enormity of those transgressions to obtain pardon for which the Saviour Himself had been betrayed and crucified—dead and buried.

Often when speaking to Mr. Butler or Edwyn of his feelings on that day, he declared that he knew not what had restrained him from flinging himself at the foot of the cross, and lying there until by tears and groans of penitence and agony, he had relieved his overburdened heart. The solemn beauty of the sanctuary inspired him even at that moment with a holy awe; the white robed priests and choir, the adoring congregation, the swelling organ and chanted prayer, all filled him with an awful sense of the presence of Him in Whose sight he knew himself to be guilty and condemned; a feeling of utter despair seemed to paralyze his soul, when suddenly that anthem rose upon his ear, softening the agony of his repentance; one voice, sweet

and clear as the song of angels, pierced to his inmost soul, and the thought of her, who, deeply as he had wronged her, still lived in his heart and memory, brought him to his knees in an agony of repentant love.

Feeling thus, it is not surprising that the services of the Church became to him dearer than anything in the world beside. It was their solemn beauty which had been the means of awakening his soul from its lethargy; it was the fitting and glorious union of all that could charm eye and ear, all that attracts and elevates the soul of man, while it shadows forth, in something more than dim and distant indistinctness, the presence of the Deity, that touched and awakened his long hardened and impenitent heart.

Therefore, day by day, he came to offer his humble tribute of prayer and praise; therefore he kneeled in deep humility at the Confession, and bowed his head in reverent gratitude as he heard the blessed words of absolution. Therefore his ears drank in with earnest attention, the daily repeated scriptural teaching of psalms and lessons, collects and creeds. There was blessing to him also in his child's ministrations,

in the holy accents of that young voice, breathing forth the blessed harmonies of prayer and praise. Dunsford was most regular in his attendance on those evenings when the congregation and choir met to practise together, and none who heard the glorious music of that village church could have doubted that such solemn harmonies alone are fitted to address Him whom angels in their songs adore.

It may be easy for those who, in their cold formality, find themselves once in a week in their accustomed places, almost as much, it may be feared, from habit as intention, to undervalue the effects produced by a nobler service, and the thrilling power of music in the ministrations of religion. To them it is as easy to obey the voice of custom, as it would be difficult and painful to break through the habits of their childhood. But there are others, who need something to stir their souls; who in the cold silence of a formal worship find nothing to rouse them from the lethargy of despair, or the hourly allurements of temptation. For them at least, if our own hearts burn not to offer a costlier sacrifice of praise and love; for the sinner and the wanderer, the cold and the ignorant, the

wretched and the despairing, let something loftier be prepared, and while they through our zeal are thus warmed and instructed, doubt not that a double blessing will descend on all, till it is universally acknowledged that a church thus seemly in its decorations, thus glorious in its service of choral praise, is indeed the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Even when the good seed sown began to ripen and bear fruit in Dunsford's heart, much, oh, how much, was still needed to bring it to perfection! Mr. Butler watched over him as one who was indeed jealous for his soul; he was deeply anxious to prepare him for receiving the holy Communion, that one blessed means "of strengthening and refreshing" the feeble soul, but he found upon enquiry that Dunsford had not yet been confirmed, and he therefore felt compelled to defer admitting him to that blessed privilege. On mentioning the subject to Dunsford himself, he was agreeably surprised to find that he was disposed rather to accede at once, than to offer any opposition to his wishes. He listened submissively when the nature of that holy ordinance was explained to him, and its necessity both as preparing the way for a partici-

pation in the holy Eucharist, and in itself an appointed means for imparting grace to strengthen and enlighten. Mr. Butler reminded him of the blessings that had, in every age of the Church, been conveyed by the laying on of the hands of God's appointed ministers, of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, and of Christian saints, apostles, and confessors, and urged with equal tenderness and truth, that as Christ has promised to be with His apostles and their successors to the end of the world, so none need fear or doubt, but that His Spirit is still given by their hands laid in solemn prayer and benediction upon Christian heads.

Some months after Dunsford's arrival in the village, Mr. Butler heard that a Confirmation was about to take place in a town about five miles distant, and he succeeded in persuading the bishop to take Combe St. Mary's in his way, and to hold a confirmation in the church there, as many of the villagers were anxious to be confirmed. Edwyn was one of the youngest amongst them, being scarcely fourteen, but he was himself very desirous of being admitted, and Mr. Butler was unwilling for many reasons to defer the rite longer than was necessary. He of course

joined his class for examination, but Mr. Butler received Dunsford and one or two young men at his own house, and after a long and careful preparation, accompanied by deep earnest prayer both with and for them, the tickets were given, and all looked forward in glad anticipation to the day appointed for the bishop's visit.

Dunsford's growth in humility was as surprising as it was satisfactory to his good pastor, for no stronger proof of sincerity could possibly have been given by a man of his previous character and habits. He was unfeignedly grateful for the kindness and consideration shewn him by Mr. Butler, and if he wavered for a moment in his desire to be confirmed and to approach the holy table, it was rather from an overwhelming conviction of his own unworthiness, than from any such motives as too often deter men who have led careless or sinful lives, from publicly acknowledging all that in their inmost hearts they believe.

When the appointed day arrived, the candidates for confirmation assembled at an early hour at the school, and Mr. Butler with his curates marshalled them in order. The girls walked first, in pairs, clad for the most part in

simple white frocks, and each wearing on her head the modest confirmation veil. Then followed the boys, preceded by the eldest amongst the candidates, Mr. Butler and his curates being at the head of all. Edwyn and his father walked side by side, for the latter, who felt unwilling to head the procession, had begged to be allowed to walk with his child amongst the younger boys. The bells of the beautiful old church rang out joyfully, and although autumn was fast closing in, there were still a good many bright flowers to be found for dressing the church and altar.

It was indeed a beautiful and thrilling sight to behold all those young Christians assembled to testify publicly their allegiance to Him under Whose banner they had been enrolled in holy Baptism, and prepared in humble faith for the reception of that illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, which our Church encourages, and enjoins us to look for in confirmation. Edwyn, standing as it were on the threshold of his future life, viewing indistinctly and from a distance the fascinations and allurements which might hereafter tempt him to turn aside from his Christian course, felt no less deeply his need of that sustaining grace than did his parent, who had too

often yielded to the subtle tempter, and now trembled with the consciousness of his own weakness, even while he "stedfastly purposed to lead a new life." How matchless, how costly beyond measure, are the gifts of the Spirit poured out upon those who come to confirmation with their baptismal robe unstained! What clear perceptions of things that mock at the wisdom of the wise; what an intense appreciation of the spiritual life, and the communion of saints and angels, joining their songs of praise with those of Christ's redeemed, the Church militant and the Church triumphant in its mysterious union! And to those also, who, by penitence and confession, have, through God's infinite grace and mercy been cleansed from the stains of wilful sin, when in meek obedience to the Church's commands, they present themselves to God's appointed minister, in His appointed house, to receive such gifts of grace as may make them meet partakers of the holy Eucharist, how great and blessed is the consoling, healing, strengthening power, which that laying on of hands imparts!

Happy, yet very solemn, were the feelings of both Edwyn and his father, as side by side they

knelt at the altar rail, and meekly bowed their heads as the apostolic words of blessing and of prayer were pronounced by their right reverend "Father in God" the Lord Bishop of ——. Earnest and fervent were the prayers then secretly offered, that they might lead the remainder of their lives in conformity with that beginning; and more blessed and more solemn still were the emotions that thrilled through both hearts, when again kneeling side by side before the altar, they received from the hands of him who had indeed been to them a true pastor and faithful friend, the blessed food which nourishes the soul unto everlasting life.

To many hearts, indeed, that day was one of reverent rejoicing, long, long to be remembered. When Edwyn and Dunsford rejoined little Harry, who had returned home with a kind neighbour after the sermon, the father clasped his child to his heart, with a deeper and more melancholy tenderness than before, as a sorrowful doubt forced itself upon his mind, whether that poor innocent would ever be capable of receiving or appreciating the blessings which our Church provides for all her children. Yet little Harry was never absent from the public prayers, either

on Sundays or week-days. Often too when the doors stood open, even if it were not the hour of prayer, he would softly enter, and no one feared his profaning by look or gesture that sacred place. His perpetual restlessness was charmed to rest beneath that hallowed roof alone. His eye, as strangely alive to beauty of form and colour as was his ear to harmony of sound, seemed there only satisfied and in repose. He looked from a distance at the glorious altar, and bent, it seemed in more than merely imitative homage, before the blessed symbol of the cross. Then he would walk softly round each massive pillar, following with his eye, or perhaps with gentle and caressing finger, the lines of sculptured niche, or foliage, or waving scroll. Edwyn, whose sympathy with the poor child seemed as perfect as his love was untiring in its efforts to enlighten his dim soul, and amuse his feeble intellect, often repeated to him, in the musical tones which always charmed his ear, the holy sentences graven on the walls of the church; and Harry by degrees learned and repeated them also, and although to all human appearance ignorant of their meaning, who knows whether they had not some blessed influence upon his soul. Certain it is that he

became, as he grew older, more tranquil and composed, and although no sensible light dawned upon his intellect, he often tried, in a childish way, to imitate what others did, especially in any little acts of kindness. If he saw Edwyn run to lead a blind man from the church, or to help a cripple to his seat, he would presently do the like. So too in little domestic matters: he would make the simple preparations for their noon-day or evening meal with the utmost care, and arrange everything in perfect order; lay aside his clothes at night, and kneel down and repeat the few holy words which Edwyn had taught him for his evening prayer. He would tend the flowers in the garden, carefully tying up the broken stems, gathering the faded flowers, and sweeping away the scattered leaves with assiduous and loving care.

That taste for music which had attracted him first to the church, seemed to be a natural gift, and quite independent of all ordinary means of cultivation; a sort of intuitive power, which even in the absence of all other intellectual gifts, sprang at once to a certain degree of perfection.

His musical ear was of most wonderful delicacy

and acuteness. He would check, by voice and gesture, any false intonation; and to have heard any chant, even the most complicated, but a few times, sufficed to imprint it so firmly on his memory, that he could repeat it without an error, after almost any lapse of time. As he grew older, this faculty became even more remarkable; so much so, that Mr. Butler, seeing the influence which Edwyn, by one word or look, exerted over his brother, as well as the habitual reverence of his own conduct in the house of God, suffered him to take his place beside Edwyn, and sing with the other choristers; and in this the chief happiness of his life appeared to consist.

When Dunsford's change of principles and conduct had proved itself by time and perseverance to be genuine and sincere, Mr. Butler, who required an intelligent person to superintend the various departments of his farm-yard, garden, marketing, &c. which, from the number of persons forming his household, was an office of no small trust and importance, gave the employment to Dunsford, who was well fitted for it by his soldierly habits of order and discipline.

He had a pretty cottage, the garden of which was beautified, if not entirely cultivated, by Harry, who sometimes worked in it for hours; and there, when Edwyn was old enough to leave the choristers' school, the three dwelt together in a happy union of mutual affection. Their home was a happy place, though no sounds of loud mirth or boisterous gaiety were ever heard either in cottage or garden. The father felt that a spirit of humility and grateful penitence best befitted one who had so wilfully sinned, and been so mercifully reclaimed; and Edwyn's laugh was checked in a moment, if he remarked any expression of sadness stealing over his father's countenance. Little Harry too was in general silent and quiet, shrinking from strangers and every kind of boisterous gaiety. Frank Merton, however, was a constant visitor, and when with him Edwyn's happy laugh often rang joyfully through the cottage, and Harry too would look up brightly from whatever chanced to be his occupation at the moment, as if he enjoyed, although he could not fully comprehend, all that gave pleasure to those he loved.

Of all Mr. Butler's parishioners, none were

more zealous than that little family in the performance of their religious duties, no less than in acts of charity, and deeds of love to all. Deeply and truly they valued all the ordinances of the Church. The prayers there daily offered, the holy table duly spread, were found by them to be aids of powerful efficacy in the daily recurring struggle with human weakness and earthly temptations.

Yet even with helps such as these, seconded by our own earnest wishes and endeavours,

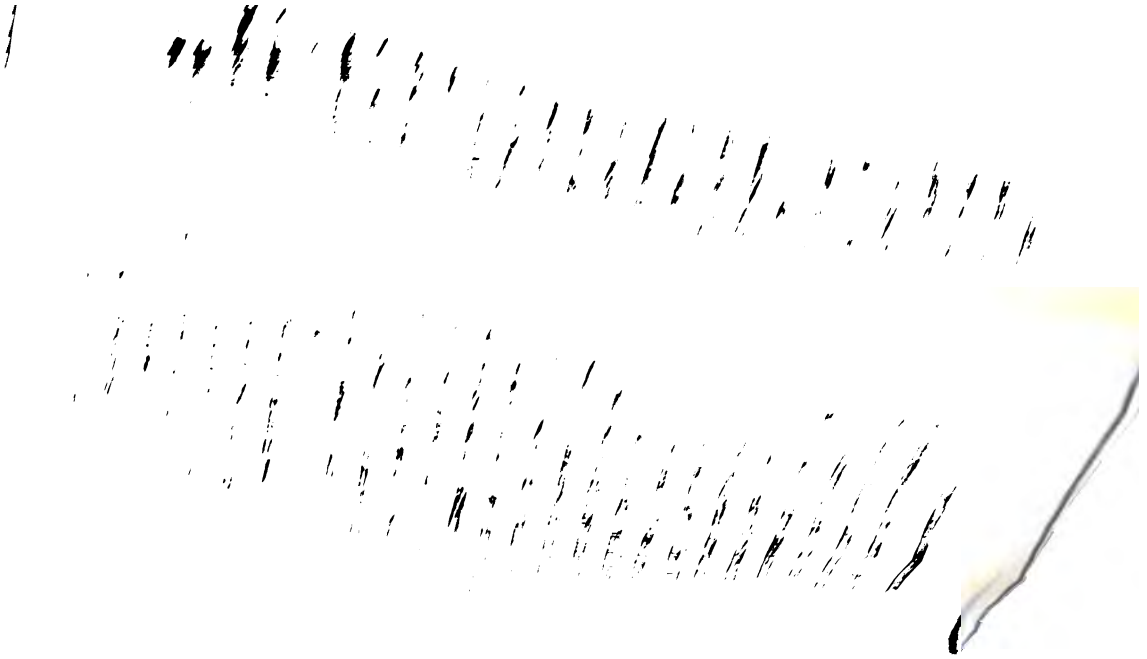
> "How weak
> Are all our steps towards that blessed clime!
> If holy thoughts within us rise, they die,
> Nipped in these brief and wintry hours of time;
> Of heavenly joys as in a dream we speak,
> And grasp with trembling hands the fixed eternity."

And so even Edwyn, though shielded by his vocation from much temptation and many sins, had yet to contend earnestly, and it may be confidently believed not in vain, against some deeply-rooted faults, and more especially against that shrinking from unpleasant duties, to which all are but too prone. Such, in this bad world, must be the lot of all. Oh! may we, whatever

be our position in life, make it our one sole aim and desire, so to live here that at last we may attain

> "Life everlasting after this,
> And heaven for earthly pain!"

St. Matthew's Day, 1853.



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